



MidCoast Cultural Plan 2036 Discussion Paper

September 2020



MIDCOAST
council

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and live, the Gathang-speaking people and pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now reside in the MidCoast Council area. We extend our respect to elders past and present, and to all future cultural-knowledge holders.



*Above image source: Saltwater healing Country, Nation Dance, Dec 2019, Biripi Nation. Julie Slavin Photography.
Front cover image source: Art in Nature Photography by Floris Van Breugel, 2015. Accessed 29 September 2020
<https://www.artinnaturephotography.com/gallery/best-of-2015/>*

A PLAN FOR OUR TIMES

We find ourselves at a unique point in history but it's the events of our past that have reaffirmed one big lesson we can hold on to moving forward - that the people of the MidCoast region are creative, strong and resilient. We have never needed culture as much as we need it now.

At time of writing, we are going through one of the worst global crises in living memory, the full effects of which we can only guess at. What we do know is that this time of COVID-19 will affect our lives and livelihoods profoundly. We are already feeling the strain, and it is a struggle for many of us to make ends meet, to keep ourselves and our families well, and our community strong.



We know that it is precisely in troubled times that cultural expression is essential to our ability to find joy and meaning in life - in whatever shape or form that may take. It brings life, hope, connection, belonging and purpose to our lives in the darkest moments. Looking out for our elderly neighbours, supporting local businesses, building driftwood shelters along Old Bar Beach¹, to connecting over knitting, singing, music, food or other creative outlets are a testimony to how the arts have the power to lift us outside our own lives and connect us to a wider community.

Participating in arts and creative pursuits improves our wellbeing and has the power to heal. Similarly, enjoying arts as a spectator has a powerful ability to move and inspire us to take action on those things that are important to us.

We also know that the arts can be a powerful tool in improving community life and expanding local economic opportunities. Regional areas such as the MidCoast are particularly vulnerable to economic downturns and environmental challenges, but at the same time have unique opportunities for using the connection to landscapes to make culture matter more. The arts can help draw attention to environmental values and challenges as well as diversify the economy by making an area a more attractive place to visit or live. From Berry to Byron

¹ <https://midcoaststories.com/2020/04/this-too-shall-pass/>

Bay, there are abundant examples of how the arts can help create a strong local identity while boosting local enterprise and a creative industry.

Some may say that the Arts is a luxury, perhaps thinking that culture predominantly lives in museums and galleries. Our community have told us that culture is an essential need - an opportunity we can't afford to overlook, and especially not now. It has a central place in all of our lives, in our streets and special places.

With its natural beauty, great location, rich history and strong community spirit, the MidCoast has tremendous potential to reap the social, economic and environmental benefits that arts and culture can bring.

With the right kind of support, building on what's already there, and seeking out funding and partnership opportunities, the arts can help restore and strengthen the resilience of our communities without breaking the bank.

This plan is for all of us. It's the first of its kind, a Cultural Plan for Council and community, and while looking at the bigger picture it will also set a pragmatic direction for supporting arts and culture across our region.

You're invited to join us in our cultural journey.



OUR CULTURAL PLAN

MidCoast Council has developed our first Cultural Plan to strengthen our creative community and invigorate our local economy. This Discussion Paper provides an overview of the background research and the main framework of the Cultural Plan – comprising vision, principles and four key areas.

The MidCoast Cultural Plan 2036 is a roadmap for bringing our region to life through for supporting and celebrating arts, culture and creativity in our everyday lives. It's a vision for where we want to be, and a framework for how to achieve a more creative and resilient MidCoast. Importantly, this Cultural Plan has been shaped by the stories and aspirations of the community and the local arts and cultural sector.

What is culture?

The word 'culture' can mean something different to everyone. Some may think of it as being associated with the arts or participating in a cultural experience like a festival or sporting match, for others it's about language or tradition. For us on the MidCoast, and for the purposes of this Cultural Plan, we have defined culture as a mix of all those things – it's a part of our everyday life – the way we live and the way we spend our time.

Culture is a shared experience that explains and entertains us - as individuals, families and groups. We find culture on the streets and down laneways, in our galleries, museums, libraries and venues, at built and natural cultural sites, sporting grounds, open spaces and in unexpected and surprising locations.

Culture is constantly evolving. It responds to the changing world around us and increasingly shifts with new technology, society practices and ways for us to consume and participate in culture.

“Culture encompasses diverse avenues of expression in architecture, arts, history, language, education, leisure, work and daily life. It's all about our ability to 'tell our story' - an essential and defining human characteristic.”

- Local Government NSW

‘Culture’ is defined as the production, distribution and participation in creativity by the New South Wales community and visitors, and the reflection and expression of its customs, traditions, heritage and social character.

It includes the visual arts, crafts, media arts, performing arts (music, dance, theatre, physical theatre), heritage, museums, archives, libraries, publishing, sound recording, film, audio visual, television, radio and digital arts. It also includes creativity in the public realm, such as the design of the built environment and public spaces.”

- Create NSW, NSW Cultural Infrastructure Plan 2025+

Our starting point

We wanted to start with what the community have already told us through the adopted plans by Council or important documents from regional organisations and State Government.

We are fortunate that a series of important documents precede this MidCoast Cultural Plan 2036. These documents include the MidCoast Community Strategic Plan, Destination Management Plan, Regional Economic Development Strategy and Disability Inclusion Action Plan as well as regional strategies and plans of organisations such as Arts Mid North Coast and Destination North Coast. This Cultural Plan 2036 links to the objectives and where relevant, the actions, outlined in these documents to ensure a consistent approach to planning for community and collective momentum that ensures gaps are filled and challenges can be overcome.

Community Strategic Plan

MidCoast Council's Community Strategic Plan was developed in consultation with the community in 2016 and 2017. The document includes a community vision and set of values that are guiding Council's planning and help to ensure this Cultural Plan 2036 is founded in what the community love most about the MidCoast area and recognise as being important for the future.

“We strive to be recognised as a place of unique environmental and cultural significance. Our strong community connection, coupled with our innovative development and growing economy, builds the quality of life we value.”

– Community Strategic Plan Vision



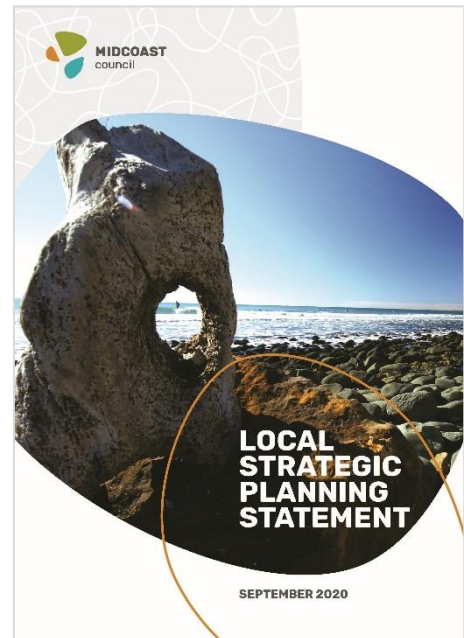
Our Values

- **We value ... our unique, diverse and culturally rich communities:** Our diverse communities offer active and social opportunities, are safe and are places where we work together with a creative focus acknowledging our rich history and culture.
- **We value ... a connected community:** Our roads, footpaths and technology are upgraded and well maintained so we can easily and safely connect with each other.
- **We value ... our environment:** Our natural environment is protected and enhanced, while we maintain a delicate balance with our growing urban centres and managing our resources wisely.
- **We value ... our thriving and growing economy:** We are a place where people want to live, work and play, business is resilient and adaptable to change by utilising knowledge and expertise that supports innovation.
- **We value ... leadership and shared vision:** We work in partnerships towards a shared vision, that provides value for money and is customer focused.

Local Strategic Planning Statement

The planning statement provides a 20 year land-use vision for the MidCoast, outlining how growth and change will be managed to enhance the high levels of liveability, environmental amenity and rural character that characterises our region

As cultural activity is undertaken in places and spaces across the MidCoast region, it's important this Cultural Plan considers and aligns with the Local Strategic Planning Statement. Further, outcomes from the Cultural Plan will also influence Planning Priority 4 Place making our towns and Villages and Planning Priority 10 Leveraging our lifestyle and amenity. As Council continues to improve on the Cultural Plan and Local Strategic Planning Statement over the coming years, it is envisaged greater opportunities can be achieved through a shared understanding of planning for culture.



What is the Cultural Plan?

The importance of cultural planning extends beyond arts and culture², recognising the broader lifestyle of residents, economic impacts and the experience of visitors. Cultural planning is about supporting the creative, artistic and cultural aspects of a place and the community. It is -

- Based on what the community value and recognise as important
- Directed towards goals and focussed on outcomes
- Informed by evidence and research
- Underpinned by a theory of change
- Constantly reviewed and evaluated

The MidCoast Cultural Plan 2036 also seeks to improve relationships and partnerships, with Council playing a leadership and facilitation role. Council acknowledges the contribution and hard work of our community and the arts and cultural sector to the cultural life of the MidCoast. We want to unlock potential investment to maximise potential cultural impact across the region.

While we're looking to 2036 within this Cultural Plan, to align with State Government planning, we have provided a plan that breaks down actions into shorter time periods. Within Council we operate on reporting periods of 4-5 years with the first set of actions tailored to what can be achieved within this period of time.

Who benefits from this Cultural Plan?

Everyone. Our aim is that all residents, workers, arts organisations and visitors can benefit from the Cultural Plan and that they will reap the benefits of supporting culture across the MidCoast.

This Cultural Plan caters to:

- **The community** who participate in arts and cultural activities. Including, but not limited to, attending festivals or enjoying a busker's talent on the street, a creative walk or great piece of public art, visiting a museum, gallery, theatre or library, to learning about our rich history through the stories of our people and being entertained, inspired, challenged, moved and excited about the future

² Fielding, K., Trembath, J.L., 2020, *A view from middle Australia: Perceptions of arts, culture and creativity*, Produced by A New Approach think tank with lead delivery partner the Australian Academy of the Humanities, Canberra

- **The arts and cultural sector** who are integral to the MidCoast identity and contributing to the health and wellbeing of our region through community and economic development

The benefits of engaging with culture are varied on both the individual and community level. Including:

- Expanding knowledge and learning for individuals
- Improving personal development such as increasing a sense of self or empowerment
- Providing recreational experiences
- Supporting social cohesion, and community and individual health and wellbeing
- Encouraging community participation
- Increasing liveability in an area
- Enhancing economic benefits including job creation, capital growth and innovation across industries

The Cultural Plan includes objectives and actions that translate into opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to learn, create and be heard. We want everyone to participate in, and contribute to, the culture life of the MidCoast.

“The MidCoast Cultural Plan aims to deliver benefits to the community through arts and cultural programs, as well as diversifying the economy to support and enable arts and creative enterprises to flourish.”

- Paul De Szell, Council’s Director of Liveable Communities.



Our objectives and research questions

Project Objectives

- To guide cultural investment and activity through a staged approach, aligned with Council's Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework
- To value the unique attributes of the Region and support the existing arts community and creative industry
- To acknowledge the potential for new income streams, identify funding opportunities, and acknowledge the importance of a diversified economy
- To recognise the need for a sustainable approach to ensure the viability of all new cultural infrastructure

Research questions

- How can we increase participation and visibility of arts and culture on the MidCoast?
- How can we use arts and culture to create a stronger local identity, celebrating Aboriginal heritage and our diverse landscapes?
- What opportunities are there for creative learning and industry opportunities?
- What existing spaces and places can we improve or repurpose to make the arts attractive, visible and relevant to the wider MidCoast community and visitors?
- Are there any gaps in provision of cultural spaces and places?
- How can we create strong networks and access funding for creative projects?

As the first of its kind, the MidCoast Cultural Plan is a foundational document that will help us prepare for the coming years and better support arts and culture across the region. The cultural planning process is ongoing and will help Council identify where improvements can be made, what kind of things the community want to see and do more of to enhance the local cultural experience and reflect the diversity of the region.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ARTS AND CULTURE TO THE MIDCOAST REGION

The arts and culture are important to the lifestyle and economy of the MidCoast region.

The widely acknowledged social and economic benefits of a strong arts and cultural sector emphasises the importance of developing a place specific, strategic cultural plan - something that is further amplified in a regional economy such as the MidCoast, where tourism is the largest export industry³. Furthermore, by aligning with Council's broader strategic direction, the Cultural Plan will aim to generate an even greater return on investment, by uncovering synergies that produce efficiency and mutually beneficial opportunities across Council departments.



4

³ MidCoast Council; Regional Economic Development Strategy, 2018-2022 - <https://www.midcoast.nsw.gov.au/Part-of-your-every-day/Council-Projects/Regional-Economic-Development-Strategy>

⁴ CircusOz2017_ModelCitizens_Band_RobBlackburnPhotography7595

Cultural infrastructure makes good cents

As Australians continue to spend more on culture and entertainment (a trend that the CSIRO has predicted to continue well into the future)⁵, investment in cultural infrastructure has become a good bet for local Councils. A study of cultural facilities across 7 Regional NSW LGA's (many of who exhibit a similar economic profile to MidCoast) uncovered a 69% ROI (return on investment) on the total Council, State and Federal capital investment that had been made into the 26 cultural facilities within those LGA's⁶. This is a figure that does not include the average \$4.24 of economic value that is generated for every dollar expended in public libraries of NSW⁷.

The findings from Council's recent Libraries Customer Satisfaction Survey, and visitation numbers from NSW Libraries⁸ affirms the value that these spaces are already providing the MidCoast community. Additionally, participants across every cultural plan engagement activity to date have acknowledged the importance and potential of the region's libraries network and the two largest pieces of cultural infrastructure, the MEC (Manning Entertainment Centre) and Manning Regional Art Gallery.

The sound financial basis, and high level of community support enables MidCoast Council to make investments in Cultural Infrastructure and the creative sector with confidence.

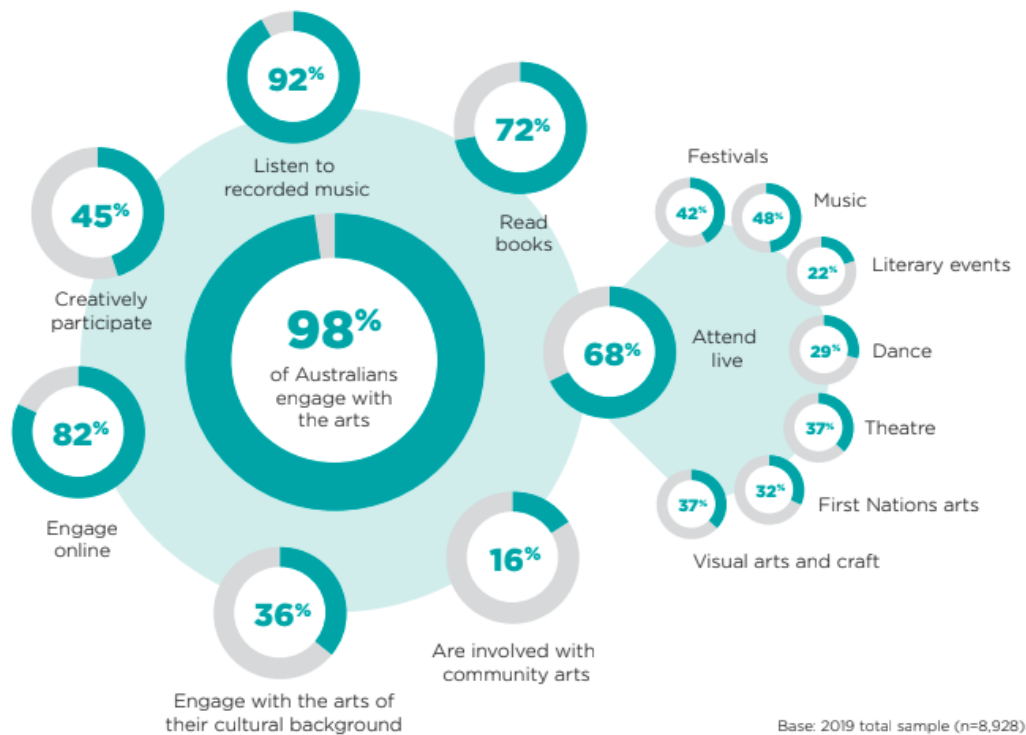
⁵ CSIRO; Our Future World: Global megatrends that will change the way we live, 2012 - <https://publications.csiro.au/rpr/download?pid=csiro:EP126135&dsid=DS2>

⁶ M&G NSW; Adding Value, A report on the economic impact of the cultural infrastructure of the Evocities of NSW, 2014 - https://mgnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Adding_Value_-_for_publication_1.pdf

⁷ Library Council of New South Wales Enriching communities: The value of public libraries in New South Wales <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/Enriching%20Communities%20-%20the%20value%20of%20public%20libraries%20in%20New%20South%20Wales%20Full%20Report.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.midcoast.nsw.gov.au/News-Media/It%E2%80%99s-true-everyone-loves-our-libraries>

Engagement with the arts in Australia (2019)⁹ - types of art activities



Insights from the National Arts Participation Survey:

- Free and accessible events was identified as the second most important priority to fund for Australians with many recognising that there are socio-economic barriers for engaging in the arts. The first priority was to ensure youth have access to the arts and can incorporate artistic expression and cultural activities as part of their learning and development.
- 73% Australians believe that artists positively contribute to society.
- One in eight Australians attend the arts to develop skills for education, training or work.

⁹ Creating Our Future, Results of the National Arts Participation Survey, Australia Council for the Arts

Creative industries are pivotal for the local economy

In total, it is estimated that the arts and cultural sector in NSW contributed around \$16.4 billion and 120,000 full time jobs in 2016-17¹⁰; meaning every \$1 expended on arts, screen and cultural activities produced a \$1.88 impact on the NSW economy. While these numbers highlight the economic benefits of arts and culture, they are of increased importance within an economy such as that in the MidCoast region, where the export value of Tourism is nearly double that of the next highest industry, and 25%¹¹ of the MidCoast economy is directly or indirectly supported by Tourism.

The importance of cultural precincts to attract cultural tourists cannot be underestimated. In the year ending December 2016, NSW received 12.3 million cultural and heritage visitors, spending an estimated \$12 billion¹². A strong cultural identity, and place making activities that create destination and experience for these types of visitors is an essential action in *“Marketing the MidCoast Region”* - the third Key Strategy within the MidCoast Council’s Regional Economic Development Strategy.

The opportunity for arts and culture to generate economic activity within the region, was one of the top three themes captured during the first round of Community Engagement, with participants from all engagement activities, across a range of postcodes and age groups recommending place making opportunities, revitalization projects and infrastructure upgrades that would make arts and culture an important part of boosting local economies.

Creativity creates jobs

The importance of arts and culture within the Tourism industry (that underpins some 6,000 jobs in the region) cannot be understated, however a future focussed MidCoast Cultural Plan will utilise the creative sector to generate jobs, upskill the current workforce, and retain young people in the region.

World Economic Forum’s Future of Jobs Report¹³, acknowledges the changing jobs markets, as a result of advanced robotics, autonomous transport and machine learning, estimating

¹⁰ KPMG Australia; The Economic Value of Arts, Screen and Culture to NSW, 2018 <https://www.create.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Economic-Value-of-Arts-Screen-and-Culture-2018-Report.pdf>

¹¹ MidCoast Council; Baseline Analysis of Tourism in MidCoast New South Wales <https://www.midcoast.nsw.gov.au/files/assets/public/document-resources/council-meetings/agenda-and-minutes/2017/07-17/dmp-docs/item-21-appendix-2-draft-mcc-dmp-summary-of-baseline-analysis-july-2017.pdf>

¹² Destination NSW, Cultural and Heritage Tourism to NSW, 2016 data

¹³ World Economic Forum; The Future of Jobs Report, 2018 - http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_2018.pdf

that one third of skills considered important in today's workforce will undergo significant change within five years as jobs disappear, new jobs are created and other jobs evolve. As a result, employers are ranking creativity as the third most important skill requirement in 2020. "Cities that foster creativity in their resident populations not only position themselves for the jobs of the future but attract the world's travellers". The MidCoast's jobs market is showing signs that support this global trend, as local traditional industry and manufacturing declines in the total percentage of workforce that it employs in the region, and demographic data highlighting the migration of young people out of the region as they pursue employment and tertiary education opportunities, and a 17.5% youth unemployment rate.

A study of Infrastructure facilities in 7 Regional NSW towns (previously referenced within this report) found that every 10 FTE positions held within these facilities had a flow-on effect of generating an additional 8.5 FTE. While MidCoast's Galleries, Museums and theatres may contain opportunities to help generate additional jobs in the region, the community recognised the untapped potential of the libraries network for upskilling and job-readiness programs.

Connected and creative communities are healthier

Participation in arts-based activity can contribute to strengthened social relationships and networks, which, in turn, increase the likelihood of good mental and physical health and wellbeing^{14,15}. The MidCoast's fastest growing demographic is projected to be retirees who migrate to the region, many of who do not have an existing social or support network in the region - a group at high risk of experiencing mental illness due to social isolation. As this demographic continues to grow in the region, so will the importance of providing programs that foster a sense of connection to place, and opportunities to develop connections within the community.

In addition to creating healthier communities, the arts and cultural sector has been proven to create a greater sense of attachment to a place, whilst also leveraging greater social capital from residents. A recent Knight Foundation study, of over 11,000 individuals, found that of all the categories of public amenities, only one stood out for its potential to enhance both feelings of attachment and concrete actions¹⁶. Access to arts and cultural activities not only

¹⁴ World Health Organisation, Geneva; Social Determinants of Health: The Solid Facts; Wilkinson R & Marmot M. (2003) - https://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/98438/e81384.pdf?ua=1

¹⁵ Fielding, K., Trembath, J.L., 2020, *A view from middle Australia: Perceptions of arts, culture and creativity*, Produced by A New Approach think tank with lead delivery partner the Australian Academy of the Humanities, Canberra

¹⁶ Knight Foundation; Community Ties: Understanding What Attaches People To The Place Where They Live, 2020- <https://knightfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Community-Ties-Final-pg.pdf>

has the potential to boost feelings of satisfaction and lifestyle fit, but also correlates with greater investment of time and resources in the community.

The median age of participants in the Cultural Plan Online Survey highlights the importance of arts and culture to older residents in the MidCoast region, and the importance that the plan must play in improving the health of this cohort. However, the sector may also have the potential to leverage more social capital from this cohort than any other initiative that MidCoast Council delivers.

“The intrinsic and quantifiable value of culture to societies has become increasingly well understood and well analysed...and are fundamental to the growth and development of nations, regions and local areas.”

— Greg Clarke, *The Business of Cities, Culture, Value and Place 2018*

WHAT WE'VE HEARD SO FAR

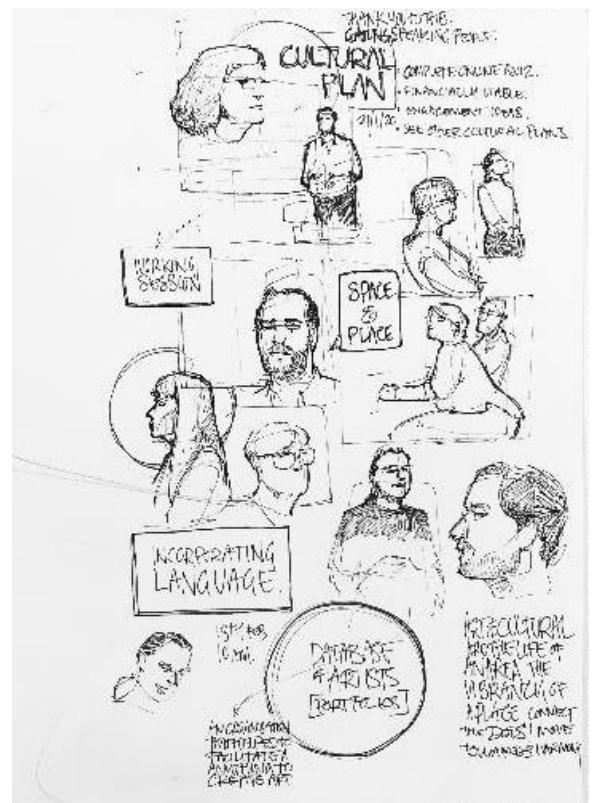
The people of the MidCoast are the experts of their landscapes, culture, heritage. They know the sights, sounds, smells - even tastes! of their local environments like no one else. They also carry rich insights and lived experiences that help to highlight what is working.

This Cultural Plan has been shaped by their input and feedback including the support and guidance from the Reference Group.

A variety of options to have your say

¹⁷The future of arts and culture in our region is bright, thanks to the time, insights and energy of the more than 650 community members who took part in setting the foundation for the MidCoast Cultural Plan 2036. During May and June, our community shared their thoughts with us online and made it clear that the MidCoast community wants to see arts and cultural activities supported in the region.

For the MidCoast, arts and culture is a way to attract visitors, support the local economy, create great places, and look after the health and wellbeing of our community. The MidCoast Cultural Plan is all about how we can use our unique location, natural beauty, and resourceful community to make the region an even greater place to live or visit - ultimately helping to build our resilience into the future.



"We have an opportunity to positively impact our community with a sense of community pride, and showcase all that is special in our region."

- Community participant

¹⁷ Sketch of Reference Group meeting by James Pearson, 2020

Engagement methods

The engagement confirmed the importance of the arts to the MidCoast community. The collective input of over 650 participants clearly illustrated a MidCoast community that wants to see arts and cultural activities further supported in the region. Across the engagement activities, a number of common themes emerged.



Briefings and virtual teleconference conversations



Online and interactive ideas map



Focus groups and written submissions



Teleconference meetings and workshops



Online surveys

In summary, we have heard that...

- The beautiful landscapes of the MidCoast are part of our cultural identity
- You want to engage with our rich history and Aboriginal culture
- We can make better use of our existing buildings and assets
- Opportunities to learn and collaborate are keys to artistic excellence
- Arts and culture have the power to drive our economy

Top 4 priorities for culture across the MidCoast

1

The natural landscape is an important part of our cultural identity

The vast and diverse natural beauty of the region is a foundational component of the MidCoast's cultural identity. These landscapes are commonly viewed as cultural assets, through which the community come together, celebrate and learn. Providing greater opportunity to connect with and enjoy these important places is a major priority for the community

2

We want to celebrate Aboriginal stories and our rich heritage

The unique cultural identity of MidCoast's towns and villages are informed by their rich history and connection to Aboriginal culture - the community wish to see these identities preserved and celebrated, and promoted across the region.

3

Creatives want better access to learning opportunities

The need for greater opportunities to learn, grow and evolve is considered an urgent priority to achieving artistic excellence within the region, and building an ecosystem of activity that will establish the MidCoast as an area of cultural and artistic excellence. Residents wish to see greater opportunities to learn from each other, as well as accessing world class educational opportunities from outside the LGA.

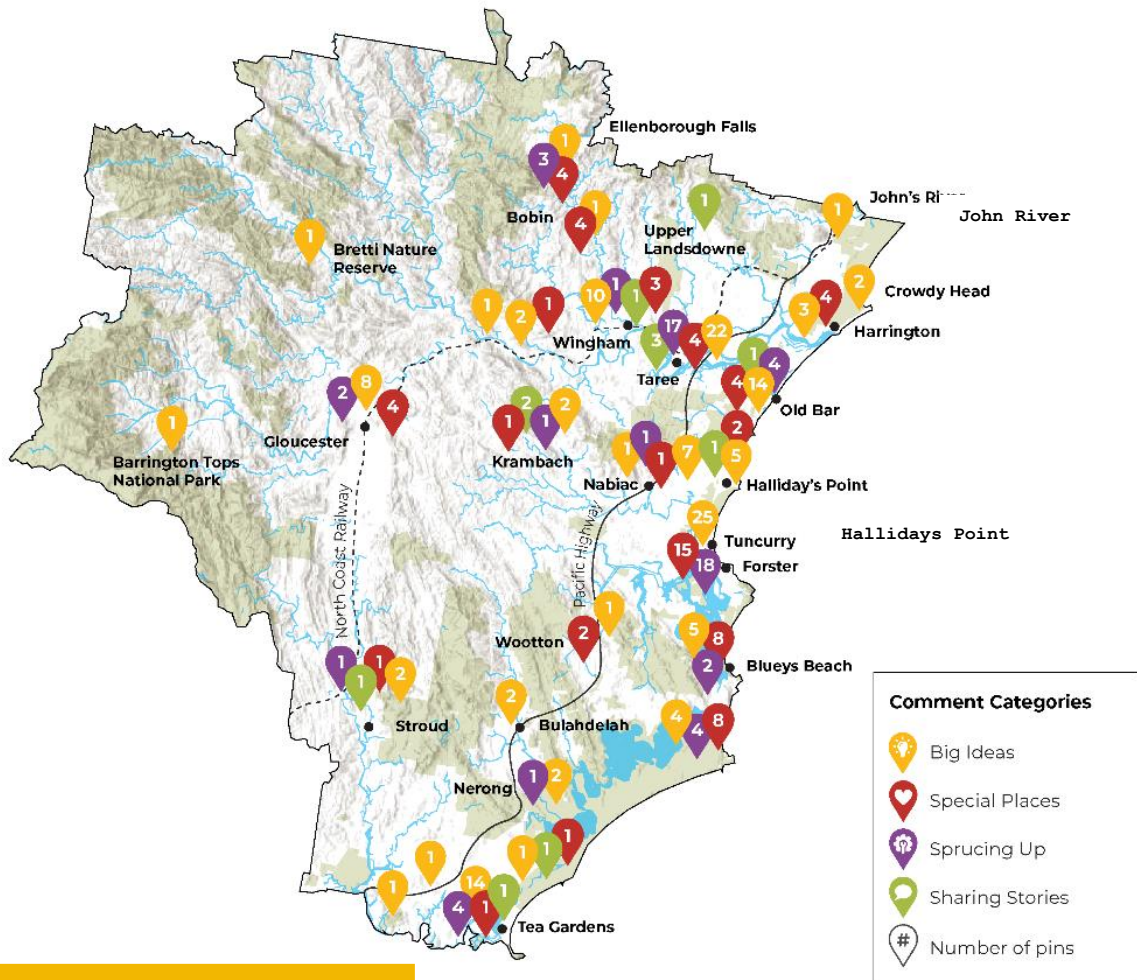
4

We can leverage our arts and culture for business and the economy

MidCoast's proximity to two of Australia's major cities provides the unique opportunity to leverage arts and culture to generate economic activity in the region, while also supporting the health and wellbeing of the community. Arts and Culture were considered essential tools to help revitalize town centres, repurpose unused spaces, and attract economic activity to the region.



Capturing input from across the MidCoast



"It is unclear to me who you would get in touch with. There is no public face to arts and culture which is readily accessible or identifiable."

"Using Gathang language in our business and council buildings and signage as they do in New Zealand. This reminds us of the historical and contemporary continuing culture of the Biripi."

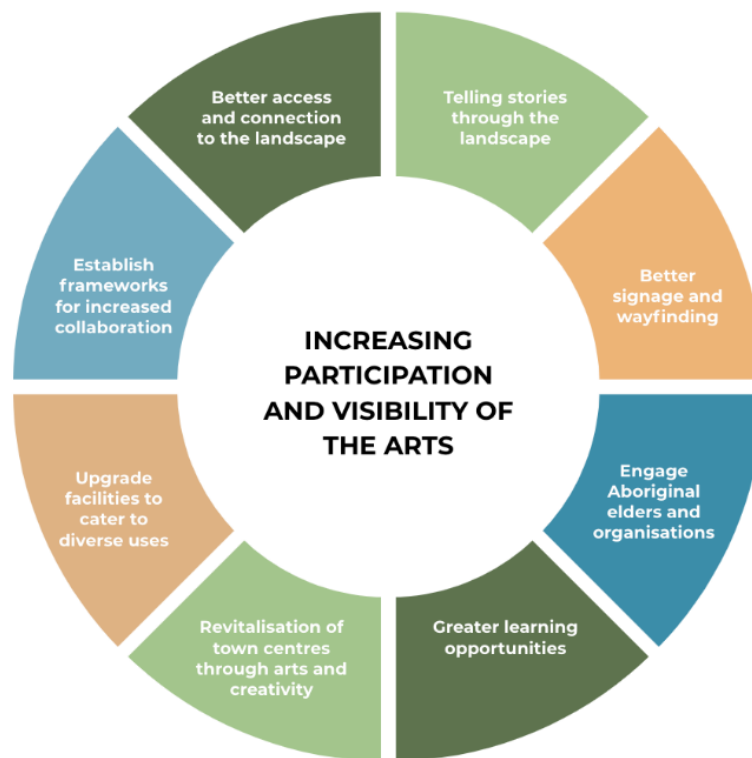
"We have got an amazing array of sporting, creative and amazing landmarks in our area that do not get enough publicity."



A shared sense of cultural value

While each of the areas and demographic groups on the MidCoast has a unique set of strengths and opportunities that can be leveraged to create thriving creative and cultural places, there are as many similarities and shared aspirations that are reflective of a community that is forward thinking, creative and supportive of enabling arts and culture within their communities and beyond. The following diagram highlights the shared opportunities across the whole LGA.

Diagram: Shared themes across the region



The community sees a great opportunity to leverage the natural assets in the area to provide greater connection to the unique landscapes - and especially the rivers, coasts and lakes - of the MidCoast. Upgrading, activating and providing more flexibility in the use of existing cultural spaces (including libraries) was identified as an avenue to achieve the above and create greater economic activity on the MidCoast.

Celebrating Aboriginal heritage was a core theme throughout the engagement and has also been identified as a key area for action in both the Destination Management Plan and the Regional Economic Development Strategy. In relation to this point, engaging Aboriginal elders and organisations was seen as a learning and discovery process and the community expressed the desire to see these stories reflected in the landscape, telling stories of place through signage and wayfinding to educate as well as guide both locals and visitors.

OUR MIDCOAST REGION

The MidCoast region has been home to the Gathang speaking people for over 60,000 years with families living in our community today sharing a language with unbroken lineage and welcoming different nationalities that now call MidCoast home.

A large and diverse MidCoast region

MidCoast Council was formed in 2016 following the amalgamation of the Great Lakes, Greater Taree, and Gloucester Shire Councils. The MidCoast LGA contains 196 towns, villages and localities covering 10,053 square km and 190km of the NSW coastline. It has an estimated residential population of 93,288, as well as 2,104,000 tourists visiting the area each year, the MidCoast is an exciting and diverse region.



The MidCoast LGA is home to a large and growing ageing resident population. The median age of our population is 52, well above the National and State median of 38, making the MidCoast population one of the oldest in NSW. In 2016, 45% of the population was over 55 years old and is projected to increase to 52% by 2036. The proportion of young people and children was 26% in 2016, and projected to decrease by 4% to 21,350 by 2036 (mainly due to out-migration of young people aged 15 to 24). The region has a large Aboriginal population of 5,567 (6.2%).

Looking to the future, it will be important for the MidCoast to attract and retain young people to the area; to create viable industries, education and employment opportunities that complement the large tourism industry; and to effectively manage seasonal pressures associated with tourism in coastal towns through diversifying tourism opportunities throughout the region. It should be noted that the current percentage of disengaged youth in the LGA (16.7%¹⁸) has remained relatively unchanged in the past 10 years, and exceeds the Regional NSW rate by almost 5%.

A snapshot profile of the MidCoast population is shown in the figure below with key characteristics across the region highlighted on the map on the following page.

MidCoast LGA community profile

(based on ABS 2016 Census and ABS Jobseeker data (May 2020))

<p>Population</p> <p>93,288</p> <p>7.2% projected increase to 100,000 by 2041</p> <p>A slowly increasing population</p>	<p>Median Age</p> <p>52</p> <p>38.4% Over 60's</p> <p>20.7% aged under 20</p>	<p>Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander People</p> <p>6.9%</p> <p>4.7% increase since 2011 Census</p>
<p>Median Household Income</p> <p>\$890/Week</p> <p>15% increase from \$769/Week in 2011</p>	<p>Attending Tertiary Institution</p> <p>4.8%</p> <p>Up from 4.6% in 2011</p>	<p>Bachelor Degree or Above</p> <p>9.9%</p> <p>1.4% increase from 2011</p>
<p>English Only Spoken At Home</p> <p>90.4%</p> <p>decrease from 93% in 2011</p>	<p>Born Overseas</p> <p>17.7%</p> <p>up from 14.2% in 2011</p>	<p>Unemployment Rate</p> <p>9%</p> <p>up from 7.6% in 2011</p> <p>In May 2020, 16% of the workforce were on Jobseeker payments, compared to 11.6% for Regional NSW and 9.2% for NSW as a whole</p>

¹⁸ ProfileID; Midcoast Community Profile, based on ABS Census 2016 and 2011 Data-
<https://profile.id.com.au/midcoast/disengagement-by-age>

Our challenges and strengths

Challenges

There are a number of local and global challenges impacting culture across the MidCoast region. As we enter the second decade of the 21st century, we are facing a series of complex global challenges where our relationship with the natural environment and the ways in which we organise our cultural and economic society demand greater attention and responsible action. It is important that we acknowledge the challenges ahead of us to be able to respond to them collectively.

Our cultural challenges include...

...ageing population and out-migration of young people

...population growth with disconnected centres and uneven distribution of services

...unemployment and local businesses experiencing continuous economic hardship

...disengaged youth

... a changing climate with more prolonged periods of extreme heat and drought

...mental and physical health issues impacting wellbeing

...decreasing fringe and experimental arts

...reliance on subsidised or grant-based funding models for cultural activity

...decreased availability for TAFE courses

... limited resources and funding available to support and upgrade cultural infrastructure

...changes in retail and shopping behaviour

...differing views across the region, sometimes varying from town to town

...Supporting artists reach their potential and connecting them with opportunity

...communications and awareness of cultural activity and experiences across the region

...considering the long term sustainability of initiatives and events that avoids volunteer burnout and leads to self-sustaining activity

...availability of expert advice and support for community and professionals

Strengths

The spirit of our people and the beauty and diversity of our natural landscape are our two of our key strengths that make our culture unique. Across the LGA a network of volunteers works tirelessly to delivery amazing community events and support social cohesion. We're also fortunate to have artists and creatives from many different crafts that are our storytellers, reflecting back our experiences and the best moments that give us own strength and drive to make the MidCoast the best it can be.

Our cultural strengths include...

...community passion, creativity and resilience

...thriving Aboriginal culture and language

...delivery of community-arts events through to high-end cultural productions

...cultural infrastructure across the region including Gallery, MEC libraries and volunteer run museums

...abundant natural beauty and inspiration

...existing tourism destinations and attractions (particularly nature-based recreation and sport)

...people proud of where they live and the community they are a part of

...local and home grown talent sharing skills and supporting each other

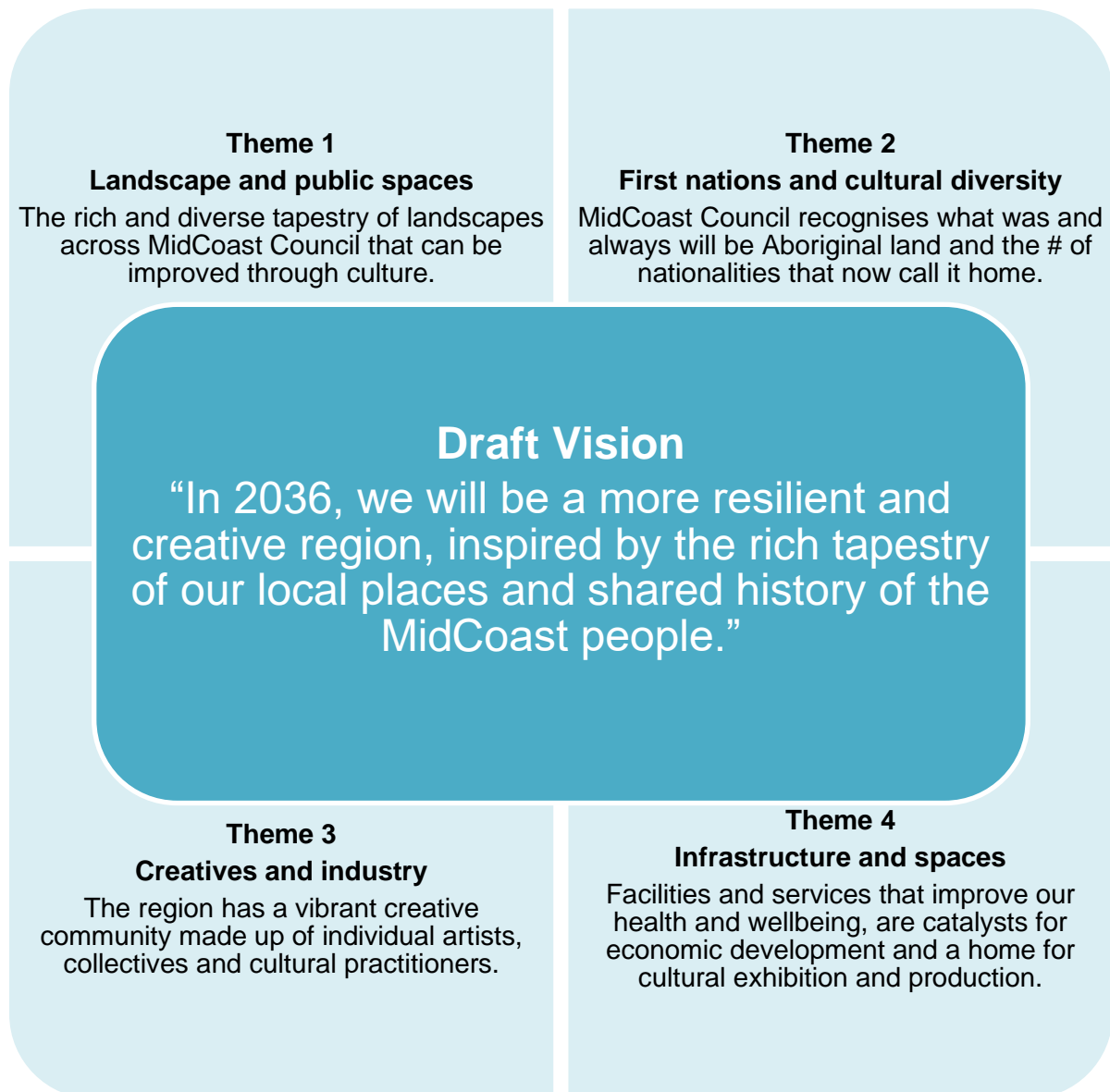
...heritage buildings and towns across the LGA

...increasing diversity of creative expression and arts



A VISION AND KEY FOCUS AREAS TO HELP PAVE THE WAY

The Cultural Plan is prepared around four key areas that respond to community priorities identified in earlier consultation. They help to achieve the draft vision for supports arts, culture and creativity on the MidCoast.



PRINCIPLES

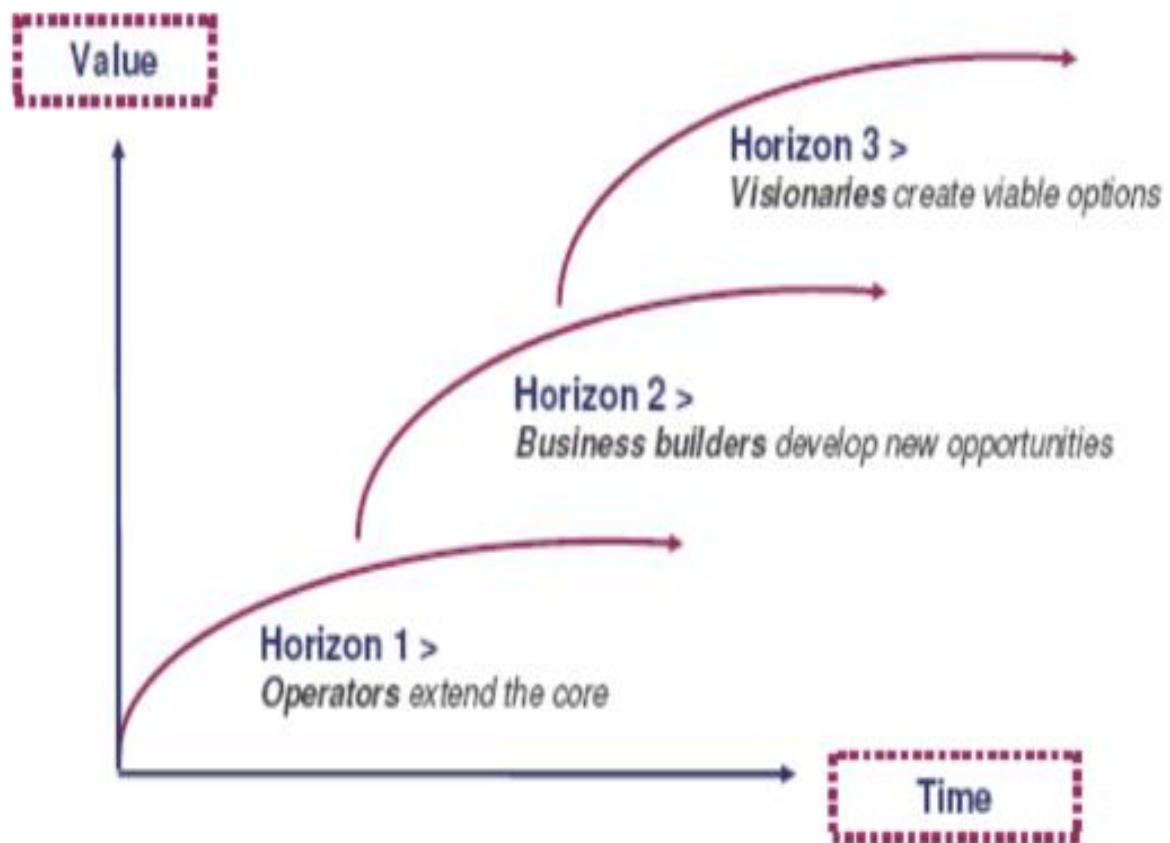
What do we stand for and what principles underpin this vision?

Values (CSP)	Cultural Plan Principles
Our unique, diverse and culturally rich communities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Creativity is at our core – it helps define and shape us and our community and places 2. Diversity is our strength – the many towns and different backgrounds of people that make up our communities across MidCoast
A connected community	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Everyone can participate – with equal opportunities to access services and facilities 4. Building bridges through culture – providing opportunities for sharing, caring and healing
Environment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. 'Caring for Country' - sustainable land management practices and initiatives and their cultural significance 6. Connected to nature – inspired by our natural setting 7. Our places are for people – creating opportunities for community to gather, feel safe, take comfort and live their lives 8. Fit for purpose spaces – meeting the needs of the community and users, highlighting the uniqueness of the context, local stories and history
Thriving and growing economy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Empowering locals – to achieve their potential and enabling innovation and experimentation 10. Pathways for professionals and organisations – made clear and achievable through the right steps 11. Embracing our authentic destinations – during the day and at night for locals and visitors
Leadership and shared vision	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Partnering to achieve better – working together for great outcomes 13. Sustainable decisions - that are supported and can prove value for money 14. Common sense and responsible approach – from Council, partners and the community



ONE STEP AT A TIME

This is the first Cultural Plan for the MidCoast LGA. We are on a cultural journey to enliven spaces, support creatives and improve people’s lives. The role of this strategic plan is to provide a roadmap and guideline for how we can achieve our vision. We believe this is best met by following an approach similar to the “Three Horizons of Growth” model which focuses on growth and innovation, starting with building a strong foundation for change.



Horizon 1: How can we pave the way?

Defining culture and identifying actions that are most closely aligned to Council’s current business. Actions here will be mostly around improving existing processes (e.g. reducing red tape) and start building capacity (funding, human resources, skills or information) to develop and plan for new opportunities. Planning for new opportunities may include conducting feasibility studies (e.g. needs and cost-benefit analysis) and shaping up business cases for funding applications. Actions in this category are likely to (mostly) be cost neutral or be funded through Council’s existing budgets.

Horizon 2: How can we revitalise and rejuvenate?

This horizon continues to build the team and cultural champions, taking what's already there and extending it into new areas of activity. Actions here will be mostly about testing out and supporting new initiatives, extending programs into new areas, and providing "make-overs" for places and spaces. There may be an initial cost associated with horizon 2 activities, but these investments should return fairly reliably or be funded through activities identified in horizon 1. This is based on them being an extension of your current proven business model.

Horizon 3: How can we innovate and recreate?

This stage is about Introducing entirely new elements to arts and creativity on MidCoast that don't exist today. Actions here may involve regulatory reform or be "Big Ideas" that may be unproven and potentially require significant investment. To plan for this stage, it is important that the actions include steps to "make it happen". This may involve things like research projects, pilot programs or entirely new funding opportunities for projects (e.g. capital investments into new cultural infrastructure) that require significant upfront investment.

"If I have seen further than others, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants"

- Isaac Newton

KEY AREA 1 - LANDSCAPE AND PLACES

“It would be great to see an initiative like Renew Newcastle to take place in the vacant shops, giving small start ups & creatives an opportunity to utilise the spaces for free until either a lease can be found or they turn a profit.”

- Social Pinpoint participant

“Country is loved, needed, and cared for; and country loves, needs, and cares for her peoples in turn. Country is family, culture, identity. Country is self.”¹⁹



20

Where are we today

The MidCoast landscape is a foundational component of the region’s heritage and identity; a meeting place for the community, a source of inspiration for creatives, and a focus for the expanding tourism industry. The community values the lifestyle on the MidCoast and loves the rural, quiet and relaxed nature of living in the MidCoast, and the proximity to work, cities, family and services²¹. The MidCoast offers a relaxed lifestyle amongst a beautiful natural setting, with important metropolitan services and facilities offered nearby in Newcastle and Sydney.

¹⁹ Meaning of land to Aboriginal people - Creative Spirits, retrieved from 'Seeing the Light: Aboriginal Law, Learning and Sustainable Living in Country', Ambelin Kwaymullina, Indigenous Law Bulletin May/June 2005, Volume 6, Issue 11

²⁰ Gloucester place making and public art

²¹ Community Satisfaction Survey 2020

The expansive MidCoast region uniquely stretches from the snow-capped mountains and waterfalls of Barrington Tops, into the network of rivers, streams and waterways that run past sites of Aboriginal significance in forest, bushland, lakes and beaches. The region promotes and celebrates its 196 towns, 58 National Parks and Reserves, 5 coastal lagoons, 1 marine park, 1 International recognised wetland (Myall Lakes) and the World Heritage listed Barrington Tops. Our residents are passionate about where they live with the landscape often the backdrop to a wide variety of festivals, events and cultural celebrations, including:

- Winter Solstice Lantern Walk, Wingham
- TasteFest on the Manning
- Barrington Trail - mountain bike/driving
- Barrington Tops Wilderness Walking Tour
- Run Fest Forster-Tuncurry
- Taree New Years Eve on the foreshore
- Myall River Kayaking/Rowing Tours
- Akoostik Festival - Wingham
- Lakeside Music Festival - Tuncurry
- Cattai Wetlands Walk
- Taree Show
- Gardenista - Comboyne
- Wingham Show Society
- Beef Week - Wingham
- Forster Tuncurry New Years Eve on the foreshore
- Chill Out, Winter Festival - Gloucester
- Wallis Lake 5 Islands Tour
- Great Lakes Food Trail
- Thunderbolts Adventure
- Barrington Coast 500
- Nourish to Flourish Festival
- Old Bar Beach Festival
- Nabiac Show
- Gloucester Show
- Taree Running Festival

The MidCoast's lifestyle and amenity attracts visitors to our region. With 2.2 million visitors in 2018, tourism is an important industry for the MidCoast²². Destination NSW estimated that visitors to the MidCoast spent \$505 million in our region, which makes tourism our largest export industry. Of the visitors, around 60% were on a holiday, 33% visited friends and relatives, and 7% visited for other reasons. The MidCoast Destination Management Plan provides a framework to guide sustainable tourism development over the next 20 years. Our region is also a key holiday destination with 2.2 million visitors enjoying the MidCoast in 2018²³. Our Destination Barrington Coast tourism brand promotes our diversity of experiences. We welcome visitors to the Barrington Coast, where the leaves touch the

²² MidCoast Council Local Strategic Planning Statement

²³ *ibid*

waters from the mountains to the sea and encourage them to indulge their curiosity, seek the road less travelled and take delight in the wonders of our region.

For the region's rural lands, the fertile landscape is inseparable from their heritage and unique character as agricultural and mining towns. The timber and dairy industry of Wingham, Stroud's grain and cattle past, and Gloucester's continued cattle and dairy industry are important parts of the local culture that are uniquely tied to the landscape and abundance of the land. These activities continue to drive the major Shows in each of these areas, and inform the public art in these areas (such as Wingham's Big Log). The importance of the natural environment to the region, is acknowledged in Council's newly drafted Public Art Policy, which states *"Public art can enrich the public domain and pay tribute to the unique environment, history and community of the MidCoast"*.

In the region's thriving coastal towns, the connection to the waterways and beach has been instrumental in forming the unique identity of these areas, since the first Manning River Aquatic Festival in 1951. Amongst others, the Longview Annual Farm Party, the Forster-Tuncurry Lakeside Festival, the Myall River Festival, Rokin' by the Beach and the Old Bar Beach Festival bring together community and tourists to celebrate arts and culture, inspired by the landscape.

What we have heard so far

Arts-led placemaking is a positive driver of local economies and a key competent in creating a sense of vibrancy. It extends beyond the arts and influences the broader lifestyle of residents and the experiences offered and promoted to visitors.

Place-making creates a strong sense of place and a deeper connection between the place and the individual which can enhance the retention of a skilled workforce, and is the cornerstone on which a region can promote its tourism offerings. The community view the diverse landscapes of the MidCoast to be its greatest asset, and increased opportunities to engage with it as the most untapped opportunity in the region. Providing increasing access and experiences within these assets in an environmentally sensitive and sustainable manner is considered a resilient future for the MidCoast economy.

Outcomes - what do we want

1	Better promotion of our natural assets in a respectful and creative way
2	Authentic experiences and local stories shared across the landscape
3	Improved community health and wellbeing through good design and activity of public spaces ²⁴
4	Enhanced village identities and character through creative placemaking
5	Active and vibrant town centres through programming
6	More interesting and attractive public spaces through creative expression and public art

Case Study: Vibrant Spaces Program

The Vibrant Spaces Program is currently active across the MidCoast LGA but originally rolled out in 2010 in Taree. It positions community and common sense at the heart of good place making.

Our centres are often the heart of our towns and villages; a place to be entertained, shop, dine and catch up with friends and family. Through the Vibrant Spaces program, businesses can use the



footpath, free of charge, in return for some innovative thinking and a common sense approach to adding colour, products, comfortable seating and lively entertainment onto our streets. The aim is to encourage people to stop, linger, shop and dine, which not only benefits local businesses, but makes for a more pleasant shopping experience. The Vibrant Spaces program will continue to explore ways for businesses to activate our streets in centres.

Vibrant Spaces means you will not need a lease from Council to use the public footpath in any town centre in the MidCoast region. Street entertainment (busking, street theatre and art) is actively encouraged along with community fundraising to make projects happen.

Find out more - <https://www.midcoast.nsw.gov.au/vibrantspaces>

²⁴ Also supported by Government Architect NSW, *Better Placed*, 2017; Government Architect NSW & Transport for NSW, *Movement and Place Framework*, 2020; Heart Foundation Australia, *Healthy Active by Design*, 2017

KEY AREA 2 - FIRST NATIONS AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

“Aboriginal culture needs to be made more visible by creating more public art by Aboriginal artists, cultural signage in significant places and spaces.”

- *Online survey participant*



25

Where are we today

Through the development of the Cultural Plan, Council is committed to developing programs to improve the wellbeing of all MidCoast residents as well as facilitating reconciliation and foster education between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

The MidCoast Cultural Plan 2036 plays an important role in making this happen and delivering real benefits to the community in terms of supporting wellbeing through arts and culture programs, creating welcoming places through revitalising town centres, and diversifying the economy to enable arts and creative enterprises to flourish.

²⁵ PCYC Koori Gymnasts Aust Day_2015

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE OF THE MIDCOAST

The MidCoast is home to a large and growing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community that continues to contribute extensively to the rich culture, society and identity of the region²⁶. At the 2016 Census, approximately 5,600 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people called the MidCoast home.²⁷ Representing 6.2% of the total population (of 91,801 in 2016), the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population has grown by 1.5% (approximately 1,500 people) since the 2011 Census with an average age of 20 years old. The Aboriginal presence on MidCoast is also larger compared to the rest of regional NSW, where the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population on average make up 5.5% of the population.

As shown in the map below, some areas of MidCoast have relatively larger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations than others: many live around the Stroud, Tea Gardens and Bulahdelah as well as between Bulahdelah and Nahiab, south of Gloucester and Taree and north of Wingham.

ABORIGINAL SITES AND PLACES

Aboriginal culture and heritage cannot be separated from the landscapes and natural heritage values of the MidCoast. It is from the natural environment that Aboriginal people draw their sense of identity, pride of place and belonging. And it is from the connection to land Aboriginal people offer their knowledge and art.

In particular, the vast waterways of the MidCoast are important to local Aboriginal people, as they hold a high amount of cultural significance. For example: *cobra is a shell fish, used traditionally as a food and medicine. This animal is at risk, due to its sensitivity to contaminants in the water from livestock manure. In areas where the cobra exist a riparian zone needs to be maintained so as to protect this animal.*²⁸ This is just one example of how intertwined Aboriginal culture is with the natural landscapes of the region.

The rich Aboriginal culture and heritage of the MidCoast is reflected in the presence of significant recorded Aboriginal sites and declared Aboriginal Places throughout the region. These are the official places that have been registered and are protected under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act* as being of particular importance and significance to culture and

²⁷ Source: Idprofile.com (which is based on ABS Census data).

²⁸ Quote from meeting notes 15 February 2018 with Joedie Lawler, Uncle Pat Bungie, Gordon MacDonald, and Aunty Barbara Clarke

heritage.²⁹ There are xx recorded Aboriginal sites in the MidCoast and 7 declared Aboriginal Places in the region³⁰ - and a high potential for a much higher number, given the landscape features of the area, where coastal, river and mountains/rocky outcrops are places of high potential for Aboriginal sites as these areas would have been (and are still) traditional gathering places for Aboriginal people in the area.

ABORIGINAL ORGANISATIONS

Any decisions or initiatives that touch on Aboriginal culture and heritage must go through culturally appropriate engagement protocols that recognise who can speak for Country and allow sufficient time for the Aboriginal community to consider anything that has to do with their culture and heritage. Here it is important to bear in mind that there is not one single representative organisation that can speak for all Aboriginal people in the area, and it is important to hear from traditional owners as well as Local Aboriginal Land Councils.

There are four Local Aboriginal Lands Councils in MidCoast:

- Forster Local Aboriginal Land Council (Forster and Gloucester areas)
- Karuah Local Aboriginal Land Council (covering a small area in the south of the LGA, around Tea Gardens/Hawks Nest)
- Purfleet-Taree Local Aboriginal Land Council (Taree, Wingham and Harrington areas)
- Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council (covering a small area in the south of the LGA)

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The project team are currently finalising research on cultural groups and organisations across the MidCoast. This research will be presented in the draft Cultural Plan but in the meantime we are inviting community feedback and ideas in Round 2 consultation on how we can support different cultures across the MidCoast area.

²⁹ The official register for recording Aboriginal sites and Aboriginal Places, the Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS), is managed by the NSW Government (Heritage). While the Government holds this information and protects it under the National Parks and Wildlife Act, the true owners of this knowledge is Aboriginal people, many of whom are reluctant to share sensitive cultural information with Government departments. For this, and many other reasons relating to sensitivity of knowledge about Aboriginal sites and places of significance, the number of recorded sites and places can only be taken as an indication of the presence of Aboriginal sites. It does not by itself reflect the significance of the Aboriginal heritage of the region. Similarly, it should be kept in mind that the data reflect *recorded* sites only; not the actual number of Aboriginal sites.

³⁰ meeting with Aboriginal Elders re draft CSP

Case study: NAIDOC week/NSW Aboriginal League Knockout

One of the most important recurring Aboriginal initiatives on the MidCoast is NAIDOC week (in July), which recognises the diverse, strong and passionate Aboriginal local population by providing opportunity for members of the community to showcase their culture.

The Saltwater Freshwater Arts Alliance³¹ is the organiser of a wide program of Aboriginal cultural events and workshops, some of which are hosted through Manning Regional Art Gallery and other partners.

The annual NSW Aboriginal League Knockout event draws a large crowd and, though technically a sporting event, is an initiative that holds high cultural significance for Aboriginal people on the MidCoast.

What we have heard so far

The MidCoast community recognise the importance and richness of local Aboriginal heritage and the Gathang language, expressing a desire to engage further with the rich Aboriginal history on a day to day basis as well as through marked celebrations. Learning from and with Aboriginal people and groups was mentioned across all engagement activities. The community recognised that the places and landscapes that contribute to the character and lifestyle of current social groups carries wisdom and knowledge worth sharing and celebrating.

Outcomes - what do we want

7	A shared sense that our region is on Gathang speaking country – the traditional lands of the Biripi and Worimi people
8	A cultural destination of choice by residents within the LGA and visitors from other parts of New South Wales, interstate and overseas
9	A mix of traditional and innovative methods to engage, experience and learn from Aboriginal culture
10	More opportunity for young people to learn and participate in caring for country
11	The cultural diversity of the MidCoast region informs a lively program of festivals and events
12	Greater trust between Council and our community to achieve a truly united one MidCoast

³¹ <http://www.saltwaterfreshwater.com.au/festival/2020-program/>

KEY AREA 3 - CREATIVES AND INDUSTRY

“Regional and local and private spaces are integral to a sense of inclusion, stimulation, motivation and ability to share and express artistic viewpoints about the local community.”

- Online survey participant

“The term “cultural industries” is used almost interchangeably with the concept of “creative industries. Whereas the notion of ‘cultural industries’ emphasises the cultural heritage, and traditional and artistic elements of creativity, the notion of ‘creative industries’ tends to place emphasis on individual creative talent and innovation, and on the exploitation of intellectual property”

— UNESCO



32

³² Peter Hugill Pottery workshop_2018

Where are we today

Creative Industries on the MidCoast are widely dispersed -a community who unite at venues and cultural infrastructure.

The Arts and Recreational Services sector is reported as contributing 366 FTE jobs in the MidCoast LGA, 56 of which are directly attributed to Creative and Performing Arts. While these 56 FTE Jobs only make up approximately 0.2% of MidCoast's jobs, it must be noted that this figure has remained stable from the 2006 to 2011 Census, despite the Regional NSW average trending downwards during that same time, and maintains a nearly equal gender distribution between Males and Females.



The MidCoast Council's current register of arts and creative organisations includes 63 different creative organisations across the LGA, with Taree containing the highest concentration of these groups, followed by Forster Tuncurry, and Wingham and Gloucester containing the highest per capita concentration. It should be noted that the geographical concentration of these organisations closely mirrors the tourism spending on the MidCoast, and further emphasises the importance of Arts and Culture to the Tourism sector, which is responsible for contributing 2,265 FTE jobs and \$202.4M in value added to the region.

The largest organisation within the MidCoast Creative Sector is the arts Mid-North Coast corporation, which represents the Creative Industries across the entire Mid-North Coast, which accounts for 1.7% of total employment in the region. While this organisation does not represent artists from across the entire MidCoast LGA, it does promote Stroud and Gloucester as 2 of its 10 "Creative Places".

While Arts Mid-North Coast is a brand that is gaining national recognition, creatives residing in the MidCoast region do not currently have a unified brand, or identity that is promoted to outside of the region. Arts and creative organisations and businesses commonly identify with the stronger identities of the Townships and heritage areas such as The Gloucester and Wingham School of Arts.

What we have heard so far

The community believes that the MidCoast already has the human capital needed to drive the economy forward, with the region home to qualified individuals who value creative thinking, and have made a conscious choice to make a sea/tree change with proximity to major cities of Sydney and Newcastle. The ability to provide formal and informal learning opportunities within the MidCoast region was recognised as an important asset to building a more resilient region, that is renowned for artistic excellence.

Outcomes - what do we want

13	Increased reputation for MidCoast as a nurturing place for creatives
14	A well-resourced community and professional creative workforce
15	A region leveraging existing and new platforms for knowledge generation, cross-pollination of ideas and learning
16	Stronger networks across business, industry, education, arts and social sustainability
17	Growing clusters of new creative industries with local employment opportunities
18	New pathways to support, fund and contribute to the creative industries

KEY AREA 4 - INFRASTRUCTURE AND SPACES

“Increasing amount of empty buildings - both beautiful and derelict - which I think have to be considered as potential for startups or people looking for a bricks and mortar option for their business. It has great potential for creatives, which is proven to reinvest in community vibrancy and commerce.”

- *Social Pinpoint participant*

“Community storytelling is most powerful when ideas are focussed through the lens of the lived culture of a place. Local institutions are often trustees and repositories of local story and have enormous potential to establish and invigorate socio-cultural and economic creativity.”

- *Community Submission*



33

33 MEC

Where are we today

The role that Cultural Infrastructure must play in the community is evolving more rapidly than ever; as spaces that were once designated for artistic pursuits or cultural gatherings are now at the forefront of delivering programs that respond to the community’s financial, social and health needs.

The MidCoast region is increasingly in need of welcoming, easily accessible, adaptable spaces, that not only cater to artistic expression, but also respond to the growing health risks of social isolation in its aging populations, the increased cases of mental illness in young people, and helps to build a more resilient local economy.

In the MidCoast, residents are highly engaged in libraries and consider their experiences in them as highly satisfactory. The MidCoast Library Satisfaction Survey found that 97% of participants were satisfied with libraries (4.38 average rating out of 5).³⁴ Other popular destinations include the Manning Entertainment Centre, Manning Regional Art Gallery, private collections, museums and galleries along with Community Halls across the MidCoast area.



THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF CREATIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

Create NSW (Cultural Infrastructure 2025+) defines cultural infrastructure as Plan “building and spaces that accommodate or support culture” and includes both private and public spaces where the expression of customs, traditions, heritage and social character³⁵.

Creative infrastructure can be classified in the following categories:

Community and participatory spaces	Commercial and enterprise spaces	Practice, education and development spaces	Performance and exhibition spaces	Festival, event and public spaces
Cultural infrastructure for ‘active’ participation and spaces with resources and facilities for active making, doing and skill-sharing	Spaces for creative enterprise, including retail	Cultural infrastructure for professional creative practice and art form development	Cultural venues and infrastructure for audiences or spectatorship	Spaces for temporary, unplanned or ‘special event’ cultural use in the public domain

³⁴ MidCoast Libraries Customer Satisfaction Survey

³⁵ Create NSW, NSW Cultural Infrastructure Plan 2025+

<p>These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Libraries • Maker spaces • Cultural centres 	<p>These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book stores • Artist studios / shops 	<p>These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theatres • Dance school • Rehearsal rooms 	<p>These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music venues • Museums • Galleries 	<p>These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parks • Outdoor event spaces • Public art installations
---	---	---	--	---

What we have heard so far

The community recognise that the MidCoast region has a reasonable provision of basic public and community spaces, but desires to see these assets upgraded to be more adaptable in use, and more accessible and welcoming to a diverse range of users and programs. The co-locating of groups and organisations from different sectors was also suggested by participants - seen as an essential ingredient to building a more collaborative and economically resilient MidCoast.



Outcomes - what do we want

19	Shared understanding of need but also cost associated with cultural infrastructure
20	Upgraded cultural infrastructure to better accommodate fit for purpose uses
21	Innovative ways we can adapt existing buildings to new, creative uses (or supporting uses)
22	Co-locating cultural producers to maximise investment but also spark innovation
23	Digital infrastructure that helps creatives connect, make and produce new work (i.e. smart region)



GET INVOLVED!

We are seeking community feedback to help finalise MidCoast's Cultural Plan 2036.

Please complete a survey, attend an online session or write a submission to ensure the Cultural Plan is the right fit for MidCoast – our history, people and places.

Visit www.midcoast.nsw.gov.au/haveyoursay for more information.



APPENDIX 1 - FUNDING AND RESOURCES

The potential funding opportunities below provide a snapshot of some of the main funding opportunities for cultural and community development in regional NSW. This is not an exhaustive list, but provided to give initial guidance of potential funding sources:

Create NSW - Arts and Cultural Funding Program

Create NSW's Arts and Cultural Funding Program provides funding opportunities for arts and cultural organisations, professional artists and arts/cultural workers across a wide range of artforms and disciplines.

Australia Council for the Arts

The Australian Government's arts funding and advisory body. The Council supports the promotion and growth of diverse art forms, artists, artist groups, and organisation with tiered funding ranging from \$10,000 to \$100,000.

Regional Arts NSW

Offering a variety of funding opportunities for arts and culture projects for people living in regional NSW and beyond.

Museums and Galleries of NSW

This website offers a variety of funding opportunities and support for artists (as well as resources and links beyond the organisation's own programs).

Festivals Australia - Department of Communications and the Arts

Festivals Australia funds high-quality arts projects that invite community participation and audience engagement. Projects can include but are not limited to a parade, performance, workshop, installation or exhibition.

Information in the Easy Grants Newsletter is based on the most comprehensive and current database of grants available in Australia designed and priced for Not-for-Profits.

Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR)

With one of six project tiers being "fostering cultural vibrancy", this program offers funding of up to \$150,000 for communities in drought affected areas of NSW. Grassroots organisations and projects led by local communities are given strong preference.

Australian Government - Grant Connect

The Australian Government offers a variety of funding opportunities, where the following may be of particular interest to supporting the wellbeing of the MidCoast community through arts and culture:



- Regional Tourism Bushfire Recovery Grants - Stream 1

The Regional Tourism Bushfire Recovery (RTBR) Grants program is a \$10 million program which has been drawn from the Bushfire Recovery Fund. The program is part of the Government's \$76 million tourism recovery package to protect jobs, small businesses and local economies by helping get tourists travelling into bushfire affected regions. Focus areas include support for smaller-scale events (including the promotion of these events), concerts, festivals and/or other visitor attractions such as art installations and tourist walks. Applicants (Local Government Authorities and Regional Tourism Organisations in bushfire recovery areas) may apply for more than one grant in this stream, up to a total value of \$30,000 per applicant.

- Maker Projects: Community STEM Engagement grants

The Maker Projects: Community STEM Engagement grants aim to foster creativity and inquiry-based learning and support the development of STEM skills in students and youth under 18 years of age in design, engineering and programming, through hands-on learning.

- NAIDOC Local Grants

This funding pool aims to support activities being held during NAIDOC week

Australian Government - Building Better Regions Fund

The Building Better Regions Fund supports the Australian Government's commitment to create jobs, drive economic growth and build stronger regional communities into the future. The fund invests in projects located in, or benefiting eligible areas outside the major capital cities of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, and Canberra. Grant funding is available through two funding streams:

- The Infrastructure Projects Stream: Supports projects that involve construction of new infrastructure, or the upgrade or extension of existing infrastructure
- The Community Investments Stream: Funds community development activities including, but not limited to, new or expanded local events, strategic regional plans, leadership and capability building activities

Australian Communities Foundation

This organisation brokers funding opportunities and community organisations with over 350 funds and foundations available to worthy causes, including arts and culture.

Creative Partnerships Australia's role is to create a culture of private sector support for the arts. They aim to grow the culture of giving, investment, partnership and volunteering, bringing donors, businesses, artists and arts organisations together to foster a more sustainable and vibrant arts sector for the benefit of all Australians.



APPENDIX 2 - MIDCOAST CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

MidCoast Council Cultural infrastructure across the region by location:

Location	Name of the spaces / organisations
Forster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forster Art and Craft Centre • Lake Street Gallery • FT Senior Citizens • Forster CWA Rooms • Forster Surf Club • Forster Library • Forster Foreshore • Forster Foreshore
Blackhead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blackhead Surf Club
Booral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Booral Soldiers Memorial Hall
Bulahdelah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulahdelah School of Arts Hall • The Bulahdelah Courthouse Museum
Bunyah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bunyah Public Hall
Cape Hawk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cape Hawke Surf Club
Coolongolook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coolongolook & District Memorial Hall
Coomba Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coomba Park Community Centre
Crowdy Head	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crowdy Head Surf Club
Gloucester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gloucester Recreation Centre • Gloucester Library • Gloucester Showground
Green Point	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green Point Community Centre
Holidays Point	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holidays point pool and foreshore • Halliday's Point Library
Harrington	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harrington Library • Harrington Foreshore
Hawks Nest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tea Gardens-Hawks Nest Surf Club • Hawks Nest Community Centre
Lake Catti	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lake Catti Wetlands
Limeburners Creek	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limeburners Creek Community Hall
Monkerai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monkerai School of Arts Hall

Nabiac	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Nabiac Showground Hall ● Nabiac Library ● Nabiac Showground
Nerong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Nerong Community Centre
North Arm Cove	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● North Arm Cove Community Centre
Old Bar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Taree-Old Bar Surf Club ● Old Bar Library ● Old Bar Foreshore
Pacific Palms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pacific Palms Community Centre
Stroud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Stroud School of Arts hall ● Stroud Library ● Stroud Courthouse Museum ● Quambi House ● Stroud Showground
Taree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Taree Arts and Craft Centre (Craft Cottage) ● Manning Entertainment Centre ● Manning Regional Art Gallery ● Taree Library ● Ormsby House ● Manning Foreshore
Tea Gardens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Myall Community Art and Craft Centre ● Tea Gardens Library
Tuncurry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tuncurry Memorial Hall ● Tuncurry Foreshore
Wingham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wingham Town Hall ● Wingham Library ● Wingham Showground ● Wootton Community Centre

APPENDIX 3 - GLOSSARY

Culture	Culture is defined as the production, distribution and participation in creativity by residents, workers and visitors, and the reflection and expression of a place’s customs, traditions, heritage and social character. This includes visual and performing arts, music, museums and galleries, the representation and animation of our history and heritage, libraries, craft, design, food, publishing, film, literature, digital and new media, television and interactive software. It also includes creativity in the public realm, such as the design of the built environment including public spaces, imaginative use of lighting and expressions of community identity through special events and place-based celebrations." Source: adapted from Cultural Infrastructure Plan 2025+, Create NSW
Cultural Planning	Cultural Planning aims to assist in the realisation of a desired future, to provide a platform for the community’s values and aspirations, and fuel social and economic development. Arts and culture has been found to play a significant role in the community with its contribution to community vibrancy, social cohesion, community capacity building and cultural identity and expression. When a strategic approach is taken in this area, the outcomes can be of even greater significance.
The Arts	Are the material ways we communicate cultural ideas and beliefs.
Cultural Development	Cultural Development involves using arts and culture activities to engage the community and realise a desired future. It describes collaborations in a number of forms which can result in social and economic development outcomes.
Cultural Infrastructure -	<p>Create NSW (Cultural Infrastructure 2025+) defines cultural infrastructure as Plan “building and spaces that accommodate or support culture” and includes both private and public spaces where the expression of customs, traditions, heritage and social character³⁶.</p> <p>The City of Sydney (who have completed extensive research in this space) defines Cultural Infrastructure across five areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● "Cultural infrastructure for ‘active’ participation for the public (such as spaces with resources and facilities for active making, doing, skill-sharing) ● Cultural infrastructure for professional creative practice and artform development (such as rehearsal rooms, artist studios) ● Spaces for creative enterprise including retail

³⁶ Create NSW, NSW Cultural Infrastructure Plan 2025+

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural ‘venues’ and infrastructure for audiences or spectatorship (such as a lyric theatre, cinemateque, Indigenous cultural centre, artist-run gallery or exhibition space) • Spaces for temporary, unplanned or ‘special event’ cultural use in the public domain (including parks, roads, built form)”.
Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Values:	Traditional values of Aboriginal people, handed down in spiritual beliefs, stories and community practices and may include local plant and animal species, places that are important and ways of showing respect for other people.
Aboriginal Place:	Are locations that have been recognised by the Minister for Climate Change and the Environment (and gazetted under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974) as having special cultural significance to the Aboriginal community. An Aboriginal Place may or may not include archaeological materials.
Aboriginal Site:	An Aboriginal site is the location of one or more Aboriginal archaeological objects, including flaked stone artefacts, midden shell, grinding grooves, archaeological deposits, scarred trees etc
Place making	Placemaking recognises the importance of having active, fun, inclusive and well-designed shared spaces to support happier and healthier communities. It is a collaborative and hands on approach that aims to draw on the rich knowledge of the local community and businesses to improve neighbourhoods. It recognises that those who use a place are in the best position to suggest what it should look and feel like. Placemaking also acknowledges the interconnected nature of physical, cultural, ecological, economic and spiritual qualities of a place (Project for Public Spaces)
Creative placemaking	Creative Placemaking is generally understood as the use of arts and culture by diverse partners to strategically shape the physical and social character of a place in order to spur economic development, promote enduring social change and improve the physical environment. ³⁷
Resilience	The capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, businesses, and systems within a city to survive, adapt, and grow no matter what kinds of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience” (Source: 100RC website www.100resilientcities.org/cities/entry/sydney)

³⁷ Markusen, Ann and Anne Gadwa. 2010. Creative Placemaking. National Endowment for the Arts. Washington, D.C., Nowak, Jeremy. 2007. The Power of Placemaking: A Summary of Creativity and Neighborhood Development Strategies for Community Investing. The Reinvestment Fund. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Chronic stresses</u> are the ongoing or cyclical stresses that weaken the fabric and resilience of a city on a daily basis. In Sydney’s case these “slow-burning” stresses include lack of housing affordability, insufficient employment diversity, geographic inequity, inadequate transport infrastructure, increasing health services demand, diminishing social cohesion and increasing chronic illness. • <u>Acute shocks</u> are the sudden, sharp events that threaten a city. In Sydney’s case the top identified shocks include extreme weather related events such as heatwaves, bushfires, storms and flooding. But there is also a risk of other types of shock events such as infrastructure failure, water crisis, disease pandemic, terror attack and digital network failure.
Public art	A broad range of works of art approved or procured by Council located in a public space or in private spaces accessible to the public. They can include music, sound and light installations, sculptures and wall murals, street furniture amongst others and be of a permanent, temporary, or ephemeral nature.
Community initiated art	Art that is conceptualised, led, and created by the community with Council approval
Public domain / public realm	Spaces that are visible, accessible, and used by the public, including public and private spaces.
Public space	Spaces under the care, control and management of Council
Street art	Art created in streets designated by Council to revitalise spaces e.g. laneways.

