

**ITEM NO: 5****SUBJECT: 2007-2008 STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT REPORT FOR THE CITY OF BLUE MOUNTAINS****FILE NO: F04301 / F04614**

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**Recommendations:**

1. *That the Council endorses the '2007-2008 State of the Environment Report for the City of Blue Mountains' for submission to the Minister of Local Government as required by Section 428 of the Local Government Act 1993.*
  2. *That in the Council's organisational business planning process, the Council considers the issues identified in the '2007-2008 State of the Environment Report for the City of Blue Mountains' that require attention by decision-makers.*
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**Report by Group Manager, Community and Corporate:****Reason for report**

The purpose of this Report is to provide an outline of the 2007-2008 State of the Environment Report for the City of Blue Mountains, enclosed separately, for the Council's endorsement.

**Background**

State of the Environment (SoE) reporting is a tool for environmental management and education. Local Councils, in recognition of their significant role in environmental management at the local level, are required to produce State of the Environment reports for submission to the Minister for Local Government.

According to the *Environmental Guidelines for State of the Environment Reporting by Local Government* (1999), the purpose of State of the Environment reporting can be summarised as follows:

- Provide the public, Councils and other levels of government and other decision makers with important information about the condition of the environment at a point in time to assist with strategic and operational planning;
- Report on the effectiveness of policies and programs developed in response to environmental change, including highlighting the cumulative effects of individual projects and environmental pressures across catchments or the local area;
- Assess progress towards achieving environmental standards and targets and ecological sustainability;
- Identify current and emerging environmental issues and important gaps in knowledge and data collection; and
- Raise community awareness and understanding of their local environment and the contribution individuals and communities make through their use of resources such as energy, water and production of waste.

**What information is available in the 2007-2008 State of the Environment Report?**

The ‘2007-2008 State of the Environment Report for the City of Blue Mountains’ includes information on Water, Biodiversity, Land, Atmosphere, Heritage, Waste and Noise.

For each section of the report – the following information is provided:

Section 1 – Water	Description of the asset
Section 2 – Biodiversity	Summary of pressures on the asset (Pressure)
Section 3 – Land	Summary of the condition of the asset (State)
Section 4 – Atmosphere	Summary of action taken (Response)
Section 5 – Heritage	Trend data
Section 6 – Waste	Definition of waste / noise
Section 7 – Noise	Summary of the impacts of waste / noise
	Key management issues in relation to waste / noise
	Summary of action taken
	Trend data

The report also includes:

- An analysis of moving around in the Blue Mountains;
- A summary of the achievements of the 2007-2008 Environment Levy Program;
- A summary of community environmental action;
- A summary of school environmental action; and
- A summary of potential environmental impacts of the council’s activities and responses.

The following table summarises some key points from the 2007-2008 State of the Environment Report.

<b>Our natural assets</b>	<b>Summary of condition</b>
Our water assets	<p>Based on the results from the Council’s 2007-2008 aquatic monitoring program, 76% of ‘urban’ biological water quality monitoring sites were rated as being in ‘good’ condition and the remaining 24% were rated as being in ‘fair’ condition.</p> <p>Reference sites are located in natural settings and are used as a benchmark. The 4 reference sites were also rated as being in ‘good’ condition. This supports the above results.</p> <p>Overall, these results are in keeping with the general trend observed since 1999 of relatively good water quality in the Blue Mountains.</p>
Our biodiversity assets	<p>Seven ecological communities present within the local government area have been listed under the NSW <i>Threatened Species Conservation Act (1995)</i> as Threatened Ecological Communities, they are: Blue Mountains Shale Cap Forest, Shale Sandstone Transitional Forest, Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest, Sun Valley Cabbage Gum Forest, Riverflat Eucalypt Forest, Newnes Shrub Swamp, Blue Mountains Swamps and Montane Peatlands and Swamps.</p>

<b>Our natural assets</b>	<b>Summary of condition</b>
	<p>At least 47 species of plants found in the local government area are listed under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act (1995).</p> <p>There are 38 threatened animal species known in the local government area, which are listed under the <i>NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act (1995)</i> and <i>Fisheries Management Act (1994)</i>.</p> <p>Forty species of plant and animal are listed under the <i>Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999)</i>. This identifies the Blue Mountains as a biodiversity hotspot with high speciation and locally restricted populations.</p> <p>It is unclear whether the increasing number of ecosystems and species being listed as threatened in recent years represents recent changes in their threatened status, or whether instead it represents an increase in our awareness of their reduced population size and vulnerability.</p>
Our land assets	<p>The significance of the natural environment of the Blue Mountains has been recognised at the regional level by the definition of much of the City as Conservation Area sub catchments, under the Sydney Regional Environmental Plan for the Hawkesbury Nepean River (SREP 20).</p> <p>Substantial areas of the sensitive natural environment have been protected, not only by the inclusion of large areas within the National Park and other reserves, but also by the creation of Environmental Protection zones and Protected Areas within LEP 2005. The zones and protected areas have been based on city-wide vegetation mapping, comprehensive slope mapping and the application of a riparian (riverbank) buffer model. Approximately 86% of the local government area is protected bushland with National Park covering approximately 70% of the total area of the City and a further 16% of protected land being predominately native vegetation.</p> <p>The Community Land stock within the City is a significant public resource, with approximately 1,640 hectares owned by the Council and a further 220 hectares managed by the Council. The Council also manages 4,000 hectares of Crown Reserves, which include sporting fields, parks and natural areas such as Mt Piddington and Mount York.</p>
Our atmosphere assets	<p>There is no reliable data on air quality in the Blue Mountains as the City falls outside the Metropolitan Air Quality Study carried out by the Department of Environment and Conservation.</p>

<b>Our heritage, waste and noise</b>	<b>Some key issues</b>
Our heritage	<p>In 2008, across the Blue Mountains there were 69 sites either heritage listed or with indicative heritage listing. There are also over 700 sites of local significance listed in <i>Blue Mountains Local Environmental Plan 2005 (LEP 2005)</i> and <i>Blue Mountains Local Environmental Plan 1991 (LEP 1991)</i>.</p> <p>The condition of the heritage places listed on various registers vary enormously across the local government area and at this stage only information on the condition of heritage walking tracks has been compiled. For the other sites, only initial statements of the physical characteristics of an individual item or building have been compiled. This is recognised as an important issue to be addressed to ensure the condition of heritage buildings and places is monitored.</p> <p>There are 400 Aboriginal sites recorded in the Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System for the Blue Mountains managed by the Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC). The register is not exhaustive as it only lists recorded sites.</p>
Our waste	<p>Traditional methods of waste disposal have proved to be unsustainable. Since 1995 waste management in the Blue Mountains has focused on reducing the volumes of waste going to landfill through resource management, community participation and individual responsibility and materials reuse. The amount of waste had been increasing until 2004-2005 and has progressively decreased since then.</p> <p>As reported to the Council in the 2006-2007 State of the Environment Report, the reductions that have been achieved in waste delivered to landfills has resulted in reduced income levels at the Katoomba and Blaxland Waste Management Facilities. The short-term financial impact of reduced income at the Waste Management Facilities is balanced by the longer-term positive outcome of the extended landfill life. This will avoid the significant financial, environmental and social costs associated with having our waste transported to waste management facilities outside the Blue Mountains.</p>
Our noise	<p>Local councils are largely responsible for managing noise issues (in collaboration with the Police) under the Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997. Noise abatement issues are generally handled by local councils, the Police, the Department of Environment and Climate Change and / or the specialised authorities such as the Roads and Traffic Authority, Ports Corporation, Waterways Authority and the Airservices Authority.</p>

<b>Our heritage, waste and noise</b>	<b>Some key issues</b>
	<p>The main source of noise in the Mountains is from transport (road and rail). The steep grades along the transport corridor also contribute to the levels of noise experienced by residents in these areas.</p> <p>Most noise complaints received by the Council relate to barking dogs.</p>

**Sustainability Assessment**

By endorsing the ‘2007-2008 State of the Environment Report’ to guide future decision-making, positive sustainability outcomes are supported.

<b>Effects</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>
Environmental	As well as highlighting the range of actions being undertaken to address pressures on our natural assets (water, biodiversity, land, atmosphere) and to manage our heritage, waste and noise, this State of Environment Report contributes to our understanding of the condition of our natural assets. This assists all Blue Mountains stakeholders in managing our natural assets so that resources can be appropriately targeted to priority action areas.	No significant negative impacts
Social		
Economic		

**Financial implications for the Council**

There are no direct financial implications in relation to the Council endorsing the ‘2007-2008 State of the Environment Report’. Any new initiatives that are developed to respond to the State of Environment are subject to the Council’s organisational business planning process with budgets and programs adopted annually in June each year or by the Council lobbying other external agencies for funding.

**Legal and risk management issues for the Council**

There are no legal or risk management issues in relation to the Council endorsing the 2007-2008 Supplementary State of Environment Report.

**External consultation**

Local community groups and residents were invited to contribute to the Report via direct mail-out and advertisement in the Blue Mountains Gazette.

**Local Government Reforms and State of the Environment Reporting**

With the State Government’s proposed local government reforms to planning and reporting, annual State of the Environment Reporting may no longer be mandatory. It is anticipated that the reforms will be legislated in the first half of 2009.

The Council is however committed to providing ongoing support for developing our understanding of our progress towards our City Vision *Towards a More Sustainable Blue Mountains*. The Council will coordinate State of City Reporting into the future which will incorporate State of the Environment Reporting. The first draft State of City Report includes

information related to ‘Looking After Environment’ with measures and analysis on the condition of our natural assets. Many of these measures are drawn from previous State of the Environment Reports.

**Conclusion**

According to the *Environmental Guidelines for State of the Environment Reporting by Local Government* (1999), the *2007-2008 State of the Environment Report for the City of Blue Mountains* is an important management and decision making tool for the Council. It is recommended that as part of the Council’s next organisational business planning process, the Council considers the issues identified in the ‘*2007-2008 State of the Environment Report*’ that require attention by decision makers.

When making decisions about the City of Blue Mountains, the Council as steward on behalf of community plays a significant leadership role in developing policy for managing the community’s assets and providing services to Blue Mountains people. The Council’s leadership role for the City on behalf of community means that policy and decision making by the Council can promote efficient, wise and effective management of resources, environmentally responsible actions which are fair and equitable and which promote liveable, vibrant communities with a sense of place and belonging for all.

An opportunity now exists for the Council to respond proactively to issues presented in the ‘*2007-2008 State of the Environment Report for the City of Blue Mountains*’ through making decisions and developing policy that will result in more sustainable action by the Council.

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