

UPPER MACQUARIE COUNTY COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT

2020-2021 FINANCIAL YEAR

INTRODUCTION

Chairman's Message

We are near the end of the current County Council term, and I am pleased to report that because the Council takes its *local weed control authority* function very seriously, nearly 90% of the 330,000 ha of private and public land inspected over the last 3 years have at last assessment been found to be of low weed biosecurity risk.

This outcome is due to the efforts of the Council through a combination of undertaking enforcement activity and providing various forms of advice and support to property owners. The Council's staff have been very diligent in developing strong relationships with both government agencies and industry interest groups with resulting higher levels of cooperation with, and understanding of, weed landholder biosecurity duties. No previous Council has been able to build these links nor monitor compliance or report comprehensively on the weed biosecurity outcomes resulting from their work

During this past year the County Council has further consolidated its relatively new and improved approach to managing weed biosecurity risk within our region, and this approach it is now a best-practice example for other weed control agencies to follow. Essentially the approach involves systematically inspecting properties, identifying their weed risk status, and then through a cycle of re-inspections and support or enforcement (as required) pursuing the high weed biosecurity risk properties until they are brought under control.

The Councils always prefers cooperation over strict enforcement and always considers situations where landholders are genuinely challenged by drought, bushfires, or pandemic. Notwithstanding, for those landholders that wouldn't cooperate or who ignored or otherwise refused to meet their weed biosecurity duty in the last year, enforcement action included the issue of almost 70 new Biosecurity Directions and 25 Penalty Infringement Notices.

The importance of all landholders meeting their legal weed biosecurity duty can never be overstated – as the viability of our farming sector, the quality of agricultural production, and the conservation of our natural environment depend on it. In simple terms we all need to accept that it is our shared responsibility to control the growth and spread of priority weeds (noxious weeds) in our region – by controlling those weeds on our own properties. It has been pleasing to see key NSW public land agencies significantly ramp-up their weed control efforts in recent times.

Once again, I would like to extend my gratitude to the Mayors, Councillors, and General Managers of our constituent local councils for their ongoing support, the County Council Members for their active participation and diligence in dealing with County Council business, and to the General Manager and staff of Upper Macquarie County Council for their hard work and dedication to weed biosecurity risk during this past year. I would also like to recognise the ongoing support and assistance from the NSW Department of Primary Industries and Local Land Services.

Cr Ian North
Chairman

Upper Macquarie County Council



General Manager's Report

The 2020/2021 financial year was the third (3rd) full-year in which the Upper Macquarie County Council was actively implementing its new 10-year Business Activity Strategic Plan, that is its concept of operations as the *local weed control authority* within the meaning of the Biosecurity Act (2015) NSW.

Operationally this past year focussed on consolidation and refinement of the now established risk-based biosecurity management system adopted by the Council in 2018. That system continues to allow the Council to better target its limited resources towards the properties with the more serious weed infestations and facilitates an objective and logical process for initially identifying properties and if required pursuing landholders that are not, or refuse to, meet their individual weed biosecurity duties.

The close liaison with public land authorities in the district regarding their weed biosecurity duties continued. The understanding of the respective roles and processes associated with the Council's local weed biosecurity activities has been further operationalised, with a *Memorandum of Understanding* in place for public road related landholders, and a formalised weed biosecurity notice process active for all other public land holders. It has been pleasing to note that Forestry Corporation, Local Land Services, Crown Lands, and Transport for NSW have all been suitably responsive to weed biosecurity risk matters brought to their attention during the last year.

Seasonal aerial weed control programs to support, and the roadsides weed management program, were a focus during this last year, landholders with more difficult weed control access or site conditions; and roadsides that are *high-risk weed invasion pathways*, respectively needed ongoing weed management attention.

As part of the County Council's ongoing commitment to strengthen performance, integrity, and accountability, and support the Council's emerging position as a leader in local weed biosecurity risk management - there was further refinement of essential new policies and key strategic documents to ensure proper organisational governance, legal compliance, and operational effectiveness.

While most landholders continue to take their weed biosecurity duty seriously, there are still others that deliberately or otherwise fail to deal with their weed biosecurity risks. In doing so they are seriously undermining the collective weed control efforts of others, and they will be dealt with accordingly in due course.

David Young
General Manager

Upper Macquarie County Council

SECTION 1: THE COUNTY COUNCIL

What the County Council business is.

The Upper Macquarie County Council is a single purpose local government authority that is the 'Local Control Authority' for WEED BIOSECURITY.

Constituent Councils.

Representatives from the four (4) constituent local government councils come together to form the governing body of the County Council. The Members of the County Council elect the Chairman and Deputy Chairman. Two Councillors are elected by and come from each of the constituent councils.

The Members of the Governing Body of the County Council.

As at the 30th of June 2021, the County Council was comprised of eight (8) Members as follows:

Cr Ian North - Bathurst Regional Council [County Chairman]

Cr Andrew McKibbin - Oberon Council [Deputy Chairman]

Cr David Kingham - Blayney Shire Council [Member]

Cr Stephen Lesslie^[SEP] - Lithgow City Council [Member]

Cr Stephen Ring - Lithgow City Council [Member]

Cr Don Capel - Oberon Council [Member]

Cr Bruce Reynolds - Blayney Shire Council [Member]

Cr Fry - Bathurst Regional Council [Member]

Council Meeting Attendance

Member attendance at County Council Meetings for the 12 months to 30th June 2021, was as follows:

Cr Ian North	Meetings attended out of 7 held.	7
Cr Andrew McKibbin	Meetings attended out of 7 held.	7
Cr David Kingham	Meetings attended out of 7 held.	6
Cr Stephen Lesslie ^[SEP]	Meetings attended out of 7 held.	6
Cr Stephen Ring	Meetings attended out of 7 held.	3
Cr Don Capel	Meetings attended out of 7 held.	5
Cr Bruce Reynolds	Meetings attended out of 7 held.	7
Cr John Fry	Meetings attended out of 7 held.	5

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Stakeholders and Staff

The County Council has eight (8) permanent staff and is supported as required by various contractors that assist with delivery of landholder support services. There is the General Manager (part-time) managing mainly governance and business strategy, while Biosecurity Administration Manager and the Chief Weeds Biosecurity Officer (Biosecurity Operations Manager) respectively manage the administration of both business and biosecurity systems and processes, and the field-based biosecurity operations supported by five (5) Weed Biosecurity Officers.

The NSW Department of Primary Industries, in conjunction with the Central Tablelands - Local Land Services, are key stakeholders in terms of their State and regional perspectives, and their funding support involving an annual operating grant linked to the NSW Weed Action Program. These agencies also provide invaluable in-kind support with research results; weed identification; weed species risk assessment; and weed information and extension materials.

The constituent councils being the councils from the local government areas of Bathurst, Blayney, Lithgow, and Oberon are the primary funding agencies through annual operating grants provided in proportion to the relative strategic weed risk associated with each council area. The constituent council communities are the direct beneficiaries of the County Council's work and accordingly have a keen interest in the County Council's activities and in particular the impacts of weed biosecurity in relation to farmland productivity, local economic impacts and more generally the quality of life in rural communities.

Beyond landholders and residents in the County area, the effectiveness of local weed biosecurity impacts on all Australians in different ways, as efforts to control weeds in our district, is part of a national effort to control serious invasive pest plants that unchecked will cause insurmountable damage to the productivity of agricultural land, country landscapes, and waterway environments.

The County Council's source of authority.

The County Council was first constituted by proclamation of the Governor of NSW in February 1949, pursuant to the provisions of the Local Government Act (1919). The initial charter was for the *eradication of noxious plants – particularly Serrated Tussock*. More recently that charter was clarified to pursue control of various *Priority Weeds* (still commonly referred to as noxious weeds).

Today the Council derives its power and authority from two primary sources:

- The *local weed control authority* roles and responsibilities come from the provisions of the Biosecurity Act (2015).
- The *local government authority* duties and obligations come from the provisions of the Local Government Act (1993).

The area of operations of the Upper Macquarie County Council comprises the whole of its constituent council local government areas of Bathurst, Blayney, Lithgow, and Oberon and has the local weed control authority function to the absolute exclusion of those local councils.

The County Council has the following key operational functions in relation to the land for which it is the local control authority:

Upper Macquarie County Council

- a) The prevention, elimination, minimisation, and management of the biosecurity risk posed or likely to be posed by weeds,
- b) To develop, implement, co-ordinate and review weed control programs,
- c) To inspect land in connection with its weed control functions,
- d) To keep records about the exercise of the local control authority's functions, and
- e) To report to the NSW Government about the exercise of the local control authority's functions.

The County Council operating profile.

The Upper Macquarie County Council has an 'Area of Operations' that covers the whole of the local government areas of Bathurst, Blayney, Lithgow and Oberon

The County Council has responsibilities covering an area of 1.35 million hectares – comprising almost half of the NSW Central Tablelands. The area extends from high in the Blue Mountains in the east, from the Abercrombie National Park south to Kanangra Walls in the south-east, as far west as Limestone Creek and beyond Forest Reefs, and to the north-west reaching Hill End and Wattle Flat then to the north-east beyond Capertee and Glen Davis across into Wollemi National Park.

The area of operations has a population of about 77,000 residents and 41,000 landholdings made up of 842,000 Ha of private land, 122,000 Ha of forest plantations, 377,000 Ha of National Parks and 11,000 Ha of other public land.

The County Council area of operations includes parts of the NSW Central Tablelands and Upper Macquarie Valley that are highly productive agricultural land, high ecological value national parks, and vast areas of quality forest operations.

Climatically the area is susceptible to rapid weed invasion of the farmland, the parks, and the forests, escaping from properties where landholders historically do not properly control weeds on their land on an ongoing basis.

The primary weed risk at present involves the 12 Priority Weed species (noxious plants) involving Blackberry; Serrated Tussock; African Love Grass, Bathurst Burr, Cape Broom, Chilean Needle Grass, Common Prickly Pear, Gorse, Scotch Broom, St John's Wart, Sweet Briar, and Tiger Pear.

SECTION 2: OUR PRINCIPAL ACTIVITIES REPORT

Note: *This report is a near full extract from the annual Delivery Program Report provided to the August 2021 Council Meeting.*

Introduction

This report addresses the requirement pursuant to Section 404 (5) of the Local Government Act to prepare a full-year progress report relating to the delivery program. It considers the *Integrated Planning and Reporting Guidelines for Local Government in NSW* established in accordance with Section 406 of the Local Government Act (1993),

The report addresses the Council's achievements and the effectiveness of its principal activities in achieving business objectives set out in its Business Activity Strategic Plan (BASP).

Principal Activities:

The County Council is constituted as a single-purpose local weed control authority and is regulated by the relevant provisions of the Local Government Act 1993 NSW and the Biosecurity Act 2015 NSW.

Accordingly, the County Council business has been structured to have four (4) areas of principal program activity areas. The first two are core business and the latter two are discretionary business. These principal activity programs are as follows:

- Weed Biosecurity Compliance Program
- Business Management Program
- Landholder Support Program
- Roadsides Weed Control program

SUMMARY

WEED BIOSECURITY RISK inspections (and re-inspections) were undertaken by the County Council in relation to 1,558 landholdings of both private and public land, involving 194,000 ha of property and 2,480 kms of linear pathways. 708 inspections found properties with high weed biosecurity risk levels.

The County Council achieved actual on-the-ground treatment of weed infestations by various landholders covering approximately 146,000 ha of land infested by priority weeds. This was done using force [through control notices, directions, and penalties] (11,000 ha), encouragement [through notices to inspect] (124,000 ha) and facilitation [through roadsides, aerial, and herbicide sales] (10,650 ha).

There is significant evidence emerging that the Council's efforts to continuously innovate, adapt and apply initiative in biosecurity decision-making and problem solving is progressively improving the effectiveness and relevance of the Council as a local weed control authority. In this regard the Council is becoming a clear leader in the weed biosecurity industry.

Council is the only known LCA to give 4 *Individual Biosecurity Directions* to a Government Agency (Transport for NSW) – after they failed to meet Weed Control Notice requirements.

Recently, Council was the only known LCA to give a *General Biosecurity Direction* in NSW to public authorities that are owners or occupiers of roads within the Upper Macquarie County Council area of operations. This is to ensure they have suitable weed treatment programs in place that demonstrate an on-going operational commitment to meeting their biosecurity duty to control weeds on roads within the meaning of Part 3 and Schedule I of the Act.

The Council has also developed a strong and credible working relationship with key public roadside landholders in the district, through a formal MOU agreement negotiated by the County Council, with all four constituent councils and NSW Forestry Corporation, securing ongoing commitment to and standard arrangements for the annual public roadsides weed control program. This agreement greatly enhancing the ability of the Council to effectively coordinate strategic weed biosecurity risk management.

Productivity has improved significantly in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, and quality. This is evidenced by (a) improved abilities in detecting weed biosecurity risks; (b) a unique ability in demonstrating actual weed biosecurity risk reduction in both a register and mapping format; and (c) putting the systems and processes in place to successfully apply legal enforcement tools that are supported by necessary evidence and due process. (d) For the third year in a row, the County Council's recurrent and capital operations generated better-than-budget in *retained earnings* at year-end (due mainly to selling value-add services) and met the key relevant OLG financial performance benchmarks. (e) Favorable feedback was received from farmers groups and public and agencies about the increasing effectiveness and professionalism of the County Council's weed biosecurity enforcement activity,

Council staff worked closely with NSW DPI and central tablelands LLS, and other local control authorities where appropriate to share knowledge and experience and keep up to date with contemporary weed biosecurity issues. There has also been close operational liaison with NSW Forestry Corporation, NSW Crown Lands, Transport for NSW and all Local Councils – guiding and assisting with enhanced weed biosecurity activities.

PRINCIPAL ACTIVITY 1: Weed Biosecurity Compliance Program

BASP OBJECTIVES:

- WEED BIOSECURITY RISK DETECTION AND MONITORING (1)
- WEED BIOSECURITY RISK REDUCTION (2)
- INNOVATION AND QUALITY (7)
- BIOSECURITY ADVICE & INFORMATION (8)
- WEED BIOSECURITY ENFORCEMENT (9)
- AN EXEMPLARY BIOSECURITY WORKFORCE (10)
- MEASURING WEED BIOSECURITY ACTIVITY AND OUTCOMES (11)

REPORT ON PERFORMANCE AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- o The **NUMBER of PROPERTY INSPECTIONS** undertaken for the year was 1,558.
- o The **NUMBER of PROPERTIES** being classified as low risk after having gone through the County Council compliance system since July 2018 is 747.
- o The **AREA of LAND INSPECTED** was 194,000 ha.
- o The **NUMBER of BIOSECURITY DIRECTIONS & DIRECTION EXTENSIONS GIVEN** was 114 UP from the previous year as
- o The **NUMBER of PENALTY INFRINGEMENT NOTICES ISSUED** was 25 UP from the previous year and bringing the total to 42.
- o The **'HIGH WEED RISK' DETECTION RATE** was 45 % of all inspections undertaken.
- ✓ Council implemented a robust landholdings inspection regime across the county district to identify and rank weed biosecurity risks and encourage the landholder or occupier to both understand and adequately meet their weed biosecurity duty.
- ✓ Council achieved a reduced overall level of weed biosecurity risk in the county district through an appropriate mix of cooperative compliance and enforced compliance measures. The **LEVEL of FORCED WEED RISK REDUCTION** during the period was 219 Properties covering 14,000 ha.
- ✓ During the reporting period there was a focus on inspecting properties that were expected to be in areas of higher rather than lower weed biosecurity risk and to progress the re-inspection process in a more-timely manner than in the past – where landholders were that appeared either tardy or otherwise recalcitrant in their approach to weed control.
- ✓ Ongoing efforts by the Council to have landholders fulfil their legal duty to control weed biosecurity risks on their land is progressively producing more significant results. The **NUMBER of LANDHOLDERS GIVEN BIOSECURITY ADVICE** was 708 where each landholder with a high weed biosecurity risk is provided with information.
- ✓ The NSW Department of Primary Industries and the Central Tablelands Local Lands Service provided weed biosecurity support (research, publications, expertise etc) to the Council relating to local weed biosecurity matters. The Council used information and material created by NSW DPI and LLS to help promote greater cooperative compliance with biosecurity duties.

PRINCIPAL ACTIVITY 2: Business Management Program

BASP OBJECTIVES:

- WEED BIOSECURITY RECORDS & AUDITS (4)
- WEED BIOSECURITY STATUTORY REPORTING (5)
- SUSTAINABLE RESOURCING OF THE PRINCIPAL BUSINESS ACTIVITY (6)
- INNOVATION AND QUALITY (7)
- BIOSECURITY ADVICE & INFORMATION (8)
- WEED BIOSECURITY ENFORCEMENT (9)
- AN EXEMPLARY BIOSECURITY WORKFORCE (10)
- MEASURING WEED BIOSECURITY ACTIVITY AND OUTCOMES (11)
- SUPPORT GOOD ORGANISATIONAL GOVERNANCE (12)

REPORT ON PERFORMANCE AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- INDUSTRY LEADING BIOSECURITY COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT system.
- ANNUAL OPERATIONS contained within BUDGET.
- STATUTORY REPORTING REQUIREMENTS completed on schedule.
- UPGRADED ICT SYSTEM to contemporary business grade security requirements.
 - ✓ The Council was FIRST IN NSW TO SUBMIT its 2019/2020 ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENTS and receive an 'UNQUALIFIED' Audit Office finding.
 - ✓ The Council commenced the new 5-year NSW WEED ACTION PROGRAM with recurrent grant funding, through the NSW Department of Primary Industry and Local Land Services for a further five-year term that commenced on July 1, 2020.
 - ✓ The PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURE reports were made to the Ombudsman. There were no actual Public Interest Disclosures in the report.
 - ✓ The GOVERNMENT INFORMATION PUBLIC ACCESS (GIPA) reports were made to the Information & Privacy Commissioner as required. There were no GIPA requests received during the reporting period.
 - ✓ The Council's Annual Report, Audited Statements of Account and Auditors Reports, GST Returns, Financial Data Returns, and annual Code of Conduct report to the Office of Local Government were all submitted in a timely manner.
 - ✓ The 10-YEAR FINANCIAL PLAN that forms part of the Council's Business Activity Strategic Plan was updated to reflect new and changing financial conditions.
 - ✓ QUARTERLY BUDGET REVIEW STATEMENTS and regular Investment Reports were presented in a timely manner to the Council for information and review.
 - ✓ Council continued to update and maintain all relevant designated open access information was available to the public as per the Government Information (Public Access) Act (2009) throughout the period.
 - ✓ Council has been routinely provided with frank and fearless advice by management, council business has been properly transacted, decisions of the council are implemented in a timely manner, and council meetings are conducted in an orderly manner.

PRINCIPAL ACTIVITY 3: Landholder Support Program

BASP OBJECTIVES:

- WEED BIOSECURITY RISK REDUCTION (2)
- WEED BIOSECURITY RISK TREATMENT PROGRAMS (3)
- INNOVATION AND QUALITY (7)
- BIOSECURITY ADVICE & INFORMATION (8)
- AN EXEMPLARY BIOSECURITY WORKFORCE (10)
- MEASURING WEED BIOSECURITY ACTIVITY AND OUTCOMES (11)

REPORT ON PERFORMANCE AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The NUMBER of PROPERTIES in the AERIAL PROGRAM for the year was 109.
- The AREA of PROPERTIES TREATED for weed infestation was ~ 3,300 hectares.
- The AREA of WEED INFESTATION TREATABLE from HERBICIDES SOLD OVER THE COUNTER ~ 4,500 hectares.
- ✓ The Council delivered the landholder support program is a discretionary program that involves the Council developing, implementing, co-ordinating and reviewing weed control activity in support of landowners or occupiers seeking practical Council support in tackling weed biosecurity matters.
- ✓ While weed treatment is always the responsibility of the landholder and not otherwise, for strategic purposes the Council has chosen at its discretion, to assist with and undertake selected weed invasion control work on land where prohibited weed and/ or priority weed matter was involved.
- ✓ The program assisted many landholders in dealing with prohibited matter, controlling new incursions, and tackling weed biosecurity matters within difficult terrain and along high risk weed invasion pathways.
- ✓ There were two large scale aerial weed control programs delivered in 2020/ 2021 by the County Council. This was up from only one in the previous two years and involved a total of 109 landholdings and 3,300 hectares of weed infested lands being treated.
- ✓ The Council's landholder support program involving herbicide supply to landholders increased by 3 times in 2020/2021 (compared to 2019/2020) equivalent to treating up to 4,500 ha of weed infestation.
- ✓ NSW Crown Lands secured a State Grant of \$50k weed control on crown reserves, with County Council assistance. The County Council then delivered the program on the government agency's behalf.
- ✓ The County Council worked with Central tablelands LLS on the NSW Government's 'Living on the Edge' weed control project by assessing properties and supplying subsidised herbicides for qualifying landholders.

PRINCIPAL ACTIVITY 4: Roadside Weed Biosecurity Control Program

BASP OBJECTIVES:

- WEED BIOSECURITY RISK REDUCTION (2)
- WEED BIOSECURITY RISK TREATMENT PROGRAMS (3)
- INNOVATION AND QUALITY (7)
- BIOSECURITY ADVICE & INFORMATION (8)
- AN EXEMPLARY BIOSECURITY WORKFORCE (10)
- MEASURING WEED BIOSECURITY ACTIVITY AND OUTCOMES (11)

REPORT ON PERFORMANCE AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The NUMBER of ROADS INSPECTED for the year was 114.
- The LENGTH of ROADSIDES TREATED for weed infestation was ~ 1,034 kilometres.
- The AREA of ROADSIDES TREATED for weed infestation was ~ 2,068 hectares.
- ✓ This program was planned and coordinated by the Council with 66% of the cost paid by program participants. The program participants are the four constituent local councils and the NSW Forestry Corporation, as they are all the public authorities that are legally the 'owners' or 'occupiers' of the public roads throughout the area of operations and as such have the weed biosecurity duty for roadsides.
- ✓ The roadsides weed control program responds to the road-related findings that arise from inspections and assessment work undertaken in the weed biosecurity compliance program. Roadsides treated under this program were in the local Council areas of Bathurst, Blayney, Lithgow, and Oberon.
- ✓ This was the third year of a three-year program for constituent councils to permanently increase their voluntary contributions to progressively fully fund the roadside weed control program on a recurrent basis. The councils have agreed to increase their annual voluntary contributions progressively over three years from 2019/2020 to the combined recurrent amount of \$150,000.
- ✓ The annual roadsides weed treatment programs was successfully delivered during the year – accounting for roadside weed control treatment across 114 roads extending for 1,034 kms equivalent to 2,068 ha.
- ✓ During the reporting period new formal arrangement for planning, funding and delivery of an annual roadsides weed control program was put in place and agreed through a Memorandum of Understanding signed by all program participants. This arrangement was assisted by the Council issuing a General Biosecurity Direction requiring that appropriate plans and be in place and resources allocated on a recurrent basis. This approach allows for economies of scale cost benefits and the prioritisation of target roads using the local control authorities weed biosecurity expertise.
- ✓ The Council assisted one of its constituent councils secure commonwealth funding for the undertaking of additional roadsides weed control work post-drought. The Council then coordinated the delivery of the additional work involved.

SECTION 3: OUR END OF TERM REPORT

Note: *This report is a near full extract from the End-Of-Term report submitted to the Council in August 2021. The end of term report is required to be produced and incorporated into the Council's statutory annual report and submitted on or before the final Ordinary Council Meeting in a County Council's term. The relevant Council Term for the purposes of this report is October 2017 to November 2021]*

SUMMARY

A new Business Activity Strategic Plan was developed in mid 2018 following an earlier organisational and business review by the Council. The new plan incorporated a fresh, weed biosecurity focussed, strategic direction for the Council business with two broad goals guiding the way forward, as follows:

1. Raise the County Council's governance systems, policies, and processes to contemporary local government standards consistent with requirements of the Local Government Act 1993 NSW. The outcome sought here was to become a competent and sustainable County Council in its capacity as a local council entity, and the mechanisms involved engaging a permanent General Manager and focussing the governing body on the legislatures intended purposes for the organisation.
2. Properly reinvent County Council's operations as a local weeds control authority within the context of the (then) new and largely un-tested Biosecurity Act 2015 NSW. The outcome sought here was primarily to get more weeds controlled sooner, with various mechanisms being applied to ensure landholders were informed and thereafter (if required) compelled to meet their weed biosecurity duties in relation to their landholdings.

Overall, the Council's staff and governing body worked cooperatively and to a high standard in implementing the Business Activity Strategic Plan and meeting the legislative duties and obligations imposed on it by a suite of relevant NSW State legislation. The result has been that Upper Macquarie County Council has moved from being a laggard in weed biosecurity effectiveness to a leading weed biosecurity agency.

There are two matters addressed herein as required by the Act. They are being (a) what outcomes were realised for the community – because of the County Council's business activities; and (b) what benefits were gained by the County Council from the County Council's business activities.

OUTCOMES FOR THE COMMUNITY^a

The community benefits from the County Council activities when the weed biosecurity risk at various levels (individual landholdings, local areas, and regions) is reduced and/ or does not deteriorate further. The relative value for the community of improved weed control, is derived through better agricultural productivity, improved standards of living for rural communities, and protection of sensitive natural environments.

In this context the following demonstrable outcomes have been achieved during the reporting period.

- A. Overall close to ¼ of all property (332,000 ha) in the Councils 1,300,000-hectare *area of operations* was inspected over the last three years with only ~11% of these (35,000ha) found at last inspection to be of high weed biosecurity risk while ~89% of these (298,000 ha) were considered at last inspection to be of low weed biosecurity risk.
- B. More than 5,370 on-site property inspections were undertaken by authorised officers. This involved over 3,345 *initial inspections* of new properties and more than 2,036 *re-inspections* to follow-up on landholder progress in undertaking weed control for properties issued with weed control notices, directions, or penalties.
- C. Landholders from a total of 257 properties extending for 6,160 ha took the opportunity to participate in the Councils seasonal aerial weed treatment programs and through that program have weeds on their properties controlled through an effective and flexible technique.
- D. Government land management agencies responsible for public roadside management, took the opportunity to join a Council managed annual roadsides program treating priority weeds in 231 roads considered to be primary linear weed invasion pathways. The program treated no less than 2,500 kms of such pathways equivalent to over 5,000 ha of land.
- E. Landholders took advantage of access to purchasing herbicides for weed control through the Council of a quantity sufficient to control on average up to 7,000 hectares of weed infestation (*depending on weed species, delivery method and herbicide type*).

^a Outcomes are based on weed biosecurity operational data for the period July 1st 2018 to 30th June 2021.

BENEFITS FOR THE COUNTY COUNCIL^β

The Council entity benefits when its administrative and operational effectiveness and efficiency are raised to a level where the quality of its weed biosecurity activities result in meaningful outcomes for the community. In this context the following demonstrable benefits have been achieved during the reporting period.

Overall, the key benefit is the creation of a comprehensive and sustainable operating framework within which the Council and its staff can effectively and efficiently pursue their core business of improving weed biosecurity outcomes for the regional community. The framework was built upon some pre-existing foundations that were upgraded and re-orientated as required, and made it much better, as follows:

1. During the term some 13 new or updated **policy documents** were created, and others were incrementally brought up to date and extended to meet contemporary compliance standards. Key Policies developed included those pertaining to Risk Management, Financial Management, and Procurement. This compares to the previous term that carried forward a scant collection of policies.
2. During the term some 21 new or revised key documents were put in place. Key Documents developed included those pertaining to Business Activity strategy; Weed Biosecurity inspection and strategy; Legislative Risk; and Governance codes of practice. The range of previous critical key **business strategy documents** were redesigned and re-oriented to suit the changing operating environment required through the making of new biosecurity legislation and ongoing amendments to local government legislation.
3. The **information and communication technology** system now provides a strong business-grade foundation for further incremental enhancement in line with changing business requirements. Council now has a secure, flexible, and well managed ICT system that meets contemporary performance standards required of local government agencies in NSW following adaptive redesign and incremental updating.
4. Council now has a sound and sustainable **strategic financial position** strategic budget position, provided ongoing financial discipline is duly exercised. The constituent local councils agreed to increase their recurrent funding contributions – recognising the potential for the County Council to achieve a lot as a robust going concern. This was rather than allowing the deteriorating financial position to cause an eventual wind-up the business.
5. The **reputation of Council** has substantially been restored. This has been incrementally achieved by way of the Council's growing record of success from having an exemplary weed biosecurity risk management system and on-ground action which combined are providing confirmation that (now) the County Council is the lead local weed biosecurity control authority in NSW. Previously the County Council was known for 'not getting enough weeds controlled' and this perception had pervaded the commentary of both private landholders, stakeholder groups, and government landholder agencies. Essentially there were valid and serious stakeholder concerns in the previous term about the lack of consistent follow-through and an obvious lack of commitment to proper enforcement practices.

^β Benefits for the County Council relate to activities undertaken from October 2017 to October 2021.

SECTION 4: STATUTORY REPORTING

The NSW Local Government (General) Regulation 2005 (LG (G) Reg.) in Clause 217 requires the following specified information to be included in the annual report: This information has been included in the Regulation because the Government believes that it is important for community members to know about it – to help their understanding of how the council has been performing both as a business entity and a community leader.

A. Details of overseas visits by members and council staff [LG (G) Reg. c.217 (1)(a)]

Upper Macquarie County Council had no Council Member, nor Council staff member make any overseas visits on its behalf or at its expense during the reporting period.

B. Details of the Chairman and Members fees, expenses and facilities [LG (G) Reg. c.217 (1)(a1)]

Chairman's Allowance (S249 LGA)	\$08K
Members Fees (S248 LGA)	\$16K
Members Travelling & Subsistence (Council Policy)	\$03K
ANNUAL TOTAL	\$27K

C. Contracts awarded by the Council [LG (G) Reg. c.217 (1)(a2)]

Council awarded no new contracts during the reporting period.

D. Amounts incurred in relation to legal proceedings [LG (G) Reg. c.217 (1)(a3)]

\$NIL - Upper Macquarie County Council neither initiated nor responded to any legal proceedings during the reporting period.

E. Private works and financial assistance [LG (G) Reg. c.217 (1)(a4, a5)]

\$NIL - Upper Macquarie County Council neither undertook any relevant work nor provided any financial assistance during the reporting period.

F. Details of external bodies, companies and partnerships [LG (G) Reg. c.217 (1)(a6, a7, a8)]

Upper Macquarie County Council was not a part of, nor did it have any legal interest in an external body, company or partnership.

G. A statement of the activities undertaken by the council to implement its equal employment opportunity management plan. [LG (G) Reg. c.217 (1)(a9)]

Upper Macquarie County Council has an Equal Opportunity Management Plan that applies to all 8 of its staff. There were no staff vacancies during the year. The Council has permitted flexible working arrangements for its staff in order that they can attend to family and related duties when the need arises during otherwise normal work hours. More flexible working arrangements were made available to accommodate COVID-19 pandemic related impacts on staff and their family. All staff have had training opportunities and participated in training activities based on position requirements and individual training priorities – however many such opportunities were

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compromised by pandemic related Health Order restrictions. There have been no EEO related complaints during the reporting period.

H. Details of the General Manager's total remuneration [LG (G) Reg. c.217 (1)(b)]

The General Manager's total remuneration package for the reporting period was \$111K

I. Details of the total expenditure on Senior Staff remuneration [LG (G) Reg. c.217 (1)(c)]

This matter is not applicable to Upper Macquarie County Council, as it has no Senior Staff other than the General Manager

J. Information on storm-water levies and charges or coastal protection services [LG (G) Reg. c.217 (1)(e, e1)]

This matter is not applicable to Upper Macquarie County Council

K. Information on storm-water levies and charges [LG (G) Reg. c.217 (1)(e)]

This matter is not applicable to Upper Macquarie County Council

End.



APPENDIX 1: AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

The NSW Local Government Act (1993) in Section 428 (2) (a) requires the audited financial reports be included in the council's annual report.

Those audited financial reports are provided as Appendix 1 herein.