

Port Stephens Communication and Engagement Strategy 2021 to 2025



Our vision is to actively communicate and engage in a way that tells our stories, listens to our community, informs our future and improves the wellbeing of the community.



PORT STEPHENS
COUNCIL

GUUDJI YIIGU

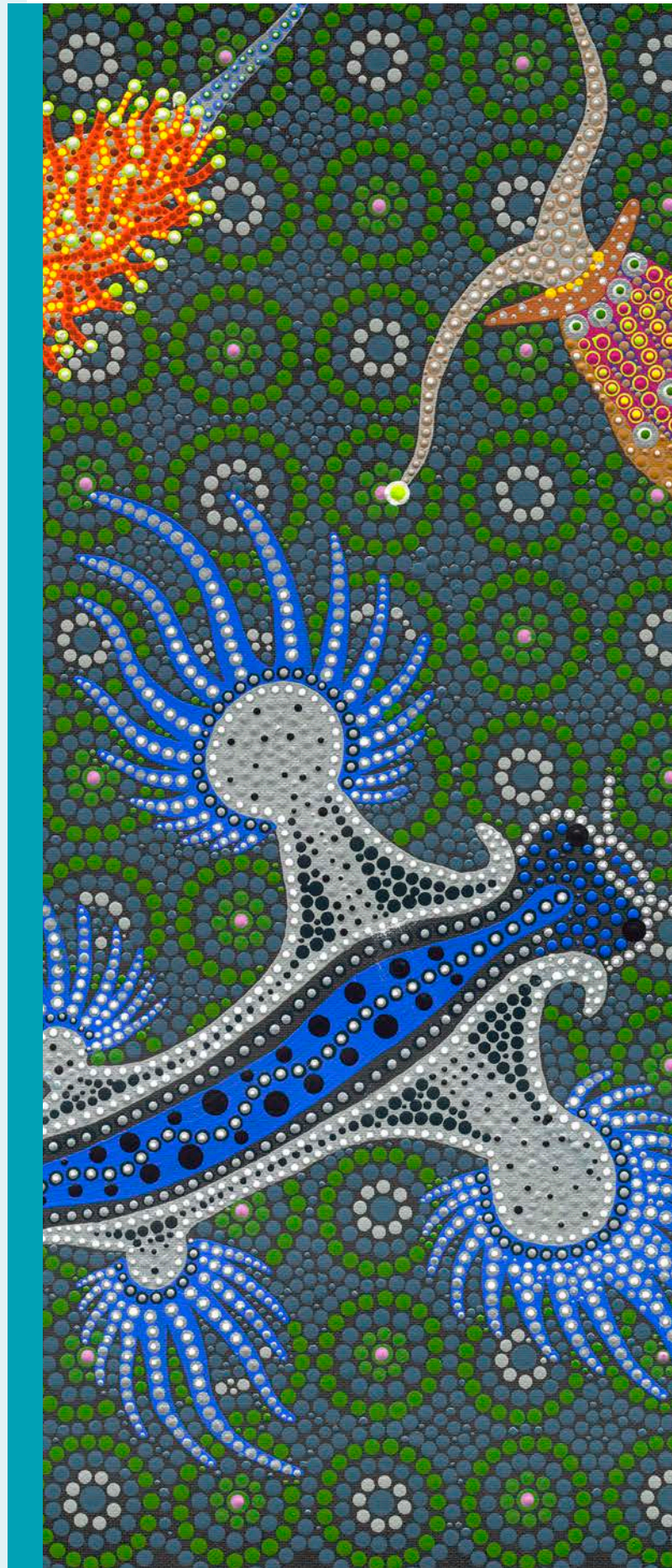
(GOO-JEE IK-KOO)

We welcome you to Port Stephens – part of the Worimi Aboriginal Nation. Port Stephens Council acknowledges the Worimi people as traditional owners and custodians of the lands and waterways on which we all live, learn, work and play.

We value and respect the Worimi people and the legacy 60,000 years of Aboriginal Nation traditions and culture brings with it. As part of Council's culture of acceptance, diversification and harmony we walk alongside the Worimi people on a journey of listening and learning.

Together we will strive to make this a better place for all peoples. As guardians of these lands, we ask that you tread lightly to help preserve the biodiversity and respect those who came before as well as those who will follow.

Artwork by Regan Lilley.



A message from the Mayor

Communication is key!

We love where we live and we live in one of the nicest places in Australia!

At Council, we understand it's our role to treasure and nurture the place we love and to enrich and improve the lives of those who live here. Some of us are born here and others come from near and far. Our community has a strong sense of pride of place and though we may be different ages, socio-economic groups, cultures or religions it's our common ground – this incredible place – that binds us and provides the foundation for a thriving community. We're privileged to be an integral part of this active, engaged, passionate community and we see the involvement of its members in the planning and decision making process as vital in helping to shape our future.

Council's communication is key to successfully engage and involve the community in influencing the future of this region. This Communication and Engagement Strategy will create a blueprint for successful and meaningful communications and engagement, reflecting our organisations commitment to genuinely involve and engage with the community it serves. The Strategy will help create a consultative culture, embracing conversations where information is shared and feedback encouraged to nurture a relationship built on transparency and trust. The Strategy reflects Council's commitment to not only inform and improve community awareness of programs, activities and services, but more importantly, the commitment to listen and create open channels of communication for meaningful dialogue, idea generation and big thinking to help shape our future direction.

We strive for inclusiveness for all in our community and, as such, our communications and engagement needs to be clear, accessible and delivered effectively to meet the needs of a diverse society. The Communication and Engagement Strategy forms the framework to support Council's vision outlined in the Community Strategic Plan and incorporates key objectives and initiatives as well as providing guidelines to ensure ongoing improvement in our organisation's communication and engagement practices.

Ryan Palmer
Mayor of Port Stephens



About the strategy



The Port Stephens Communications and Engagement Strategy has been developed to provide a framework for the delivery of open and effective communication that actively shapes and influences the future of Port Stephens.

The strategy responds to the requirements of the NSW Government Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework, the Local Government Act (1993) and the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act (1979). The strategy also responds to the key priorities of the elected Councillors.

The Communication & Engagement Strategy supports objectives in Port Stephens Integrated Planning and Reporting documents including the Community Strategic Plan and the Port Stephens Council Delivery Plan.



Strong communication in local government creates trust in its citizens. The hope is that this trust will inspire citizens to become involved in their communities.

Diligent

Communications and Engagement Principles

1

We deliver **relevant, timely and easy to understand** information

2

We're **honest and transparent**

3

We're **inclusive** and encourage a **diversity of voices** to be heard

4

We **listen, value and respect community** input and feedback

5

We embrace **innovation** and encourage **new ideas**

Strategy context

Our Council

As the closest level of government connected to the community, Council has a unique relationships with residents and business – we work with local business, we employee local residents and we have a key role in communicating and engaging with our local residents.

With over 60 individual business units across the organisation and almost 600 staff, Council delivers a large number of services to our community. We also provide the link for our community to other layers of government and are responsible for advocating our community's priorities.

Over the past few years, Council has worked hard to engage with and inform our community. However, we know from community feedback that we can do better. We've listened and are committed to working closely with our community to act on this feedback, responding to their needs and priorities.

Legislative Requirements

This Communication and Engagement Strategy has been prepared in accordance with Section 402 of the Local Government Act 1993 supporting an integrated approach to community engagement planning.

Community Participation in land use planning is a requirement under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A Act). Council now provides a single document where the community can access all of Council's community participation requirements under the planning legislation, including all minimum mandatory requirements. It sets out how and when we'll engage the community across our planning functions under the EP&A Act.

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Longer periods to digest and respond to documents including Council agendas.
Community member

International Association of Public Participation

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is an international federation of member affiliates that seeks to promote and improve the practice of community engagement, incorporating individuals, governments, institutions and other entities that affect the public interest.

IAP2 Australasia is the affiliate for Australia and New Zealand and is the world's leading community engagement association.

This strategy is committed to delivering the communication and engagement actives in line with the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum. This table outlines the IAP2 principles and sets out Council and the community expectations in the delivery of this framework.

	Inform (least impact on decision)	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower (most impact on decision)
Our goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/ or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making and/or developed budgets in the hands of the public.
Our role	We'll keep you informed.	We'll keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We'll work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We'll look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We'll implement what you decide.
Community's role	Keep in touch. Follow Council on social media. Subscribe to regular newsletters and updates.	Contribute ideas and feedback. Respond to surveys. Make public submissions.	Actively participate in the workshops and engagement sessions. Share ideas concerns and aspirations.	Work together to develop solutions. Join committees.	Make decisions and work with Council to implement them.

Social Justice Principles

The NSW Government identifies four principles that underpin social justice. These principles guide the planning, delivery and evaluation of this communications and engagement strategy.



Equity

There should be fairness in the distribution of resources, particularly for those in need. The planning processes should take particular care to involve and protect the interests of people in vulnerable circumstances. The equity implications of proposed activities include the impact on community well-being, as well as who pays and who benefits.



Access

All people should have fair access to economic resources, services and rights essential to improving their quality of life. All residents should be able to get to and use public facilities and services, regardless of their social and economic circumstances.



Participation

All people should have the maximum opportunity to genuinely participate in decisions that affect their lives. This involves a two-way flow of views and information, generally with a focus on decision making.



Rights

Equality of rights should be established and promoted. Opportunities should be provided for positive participation to accommodate linguistic, cultural and religious diversity within the local government area.

Our community

More than 75,500 people call Port Stephens home and this is expected to grow to over 90,000 in the next 20 years. People come to the area for many reasons – whether to visit, raise a family in a safe environment, work in a thriving and diverse economy or retire in this beautiful part of the world. Port Stephens’ diverse social, environmental and economic characteristics is part of what makes this place so unique. This is an important consideration in why our communications and engagement needs to be clear, accessible and delivered effectively to meet the needs of our diverse society.



75,685

people

Median age of is 45 years
NSW median age is 38 years



4.73%

of our population

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders



89.1%

have interest access
from a dwelling



79.9%

Australian population
own a smartphone



67%

finished year 10
or above

34%

finished year 12



family

2 person
families most common



65 to 74

Largest population
increase age range



35 to 39

Largest population
decrease age range



5.5%

of people have a
severe disability

That require assistance
with core activities



22,997

not in workforce

15,922

work full time

10,010

work part time

Source: Remplan

What we've heard



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Opportunities to Have Your Say are numerous but there is little opportunity to find out the result of the engagement or what other people think.

Community member

Customer Satisfaction Survey 2021



2187
responses

- Perceived opportunity to provide input in Council projects and decision making has decreased by 19% since 2019 (n=1934)
- Preferred ways to receive information from council is email at 56% and mail 34% (n=1937 responses)
- Preferred ways to provide feedback to council is via surveys 62% and direct email/phone 33% (n=387)

Community Strategic Plan



97
participants

Workshops and online survey

- More consistent engagement approach across projects and programs
- Use a variety of engagement methods
- Improve sharing and transparency of data
- Actually listen to community feedback
- Close the loop, connecting feedback with decisions



9
attendees
and 8 groups
represented

Community Focus Group

- Community involvement in engagement design
- Use community groups as an interface between Council and the community
- Get information out earlier
- Give more time for considered contributions



6
community
groups

Key Stakeholder commentary

- Perception that council has a lack of genuine and transparent engagement
- More user friendly website
- More DA notifications/advertisements
- More time to consider and respond
- Better reporting of engagement outcomes

Our strategic approach



Stories of the importance of community engagement range from creating change in local policies and service provisions that not only enrich everyday lives and liveability of communities, but help shape and envision a community's future, bringing with it wider societal change.

Bang The Table

Over the past few years, a fundamental shift has occurred in the approach to public sector communications and engagement – social media has increased the expectations of residents around access to information and two way conversations. While more recently, the impacts of COVID-19 have heightened our community's awareness of place and created a greater desire to engage in the planning for their place.

We know that effective communication and engagement are directly linked to the liveability and wellbeing of our community. By listening to our community, respecting their values and providing genuine opportunities for engagement, we can create a greater sense of community ownership and ultimately, improve the delivery of Council services to become aligned to community needs.

To achieve this, Council will deliver a genuinely integrated and inclusive approach to our engagement and communications. We'll create a culture where community is front of mind, where employees are empowered to engage in open and honest dialogue, where we embrace diverse opinions and values and where we actively work to keep our community informed and connected.

By bringing together our communications and engagement approach, Council has already created a shift in thinking – through this strategy, we'll continue to evolve this approach and build a culture that celebrates our stories and informs the future of Port Stephens.



Our purpose

To create a framework for the delivery of transparent and timely communications and meaningful community engagement that builds trust and community participation in decision making for our place.



Our vision

We actively communicate and engage in a way that tells our stories, listens to our community, informs our future, and improves the wellbeing of those that live, work and holiday in Port Stephens.

Strategic Priority 1

Community engagement



We will plan and deliver meaningful community engagement that enables community participation and builds trust in Council decision making.

Key objectives

1. Embed the principles of the International Association Public Participation into the organisational culture.
2. Implement a community reference group to provide input into the design of engagement strategies for major projects
3. Increase opportunities for the community to engage informally with Councillors and Executive
4. Design engagement opportunities that enable time for considered thought and contribution
5. Ensure engagement opportunities consider place, diversity and accessibility
6. Use technology to increase participation and increase the diversity of voice and opinion in engagement activities
7. Build on the use of social media as a tool for engagement and feedback
8. Report internally and externally on engagement outcomes, connecting community consultation and decision making
9. Improve stakeholder information management to ensure equitable representation across the community
10. Deliver Councils Community Participation Plan (Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979)

Strategic Priority 2

Community Communications



We will deliver timely, creative and transparent internal and external communications that connect our stories, our people and our place.

Key objectives

1. Design communications that are easy to understand and accessible to all
2. Recognise **portstephens.nsw.gov.au** as the core communications channel and continue to invest in its growth and improvement
3. Develop a strong social media profile across a range of channels using audience profiles which encourage conversations and increase awareness of council services
4. Increase staff awareness and capacity to enable effective communication, engagement and promotion of council business
5. Build Councils identity and brand through consistent visual communications
6. Maximise the use of live streaming and video across all communication channels
7. Use data to develop communications that are audience focused
8. Regularly benchmark and review internal and external communications platforms
9. Support elected members by keeping them informed so they can share information and increase awareness council activities and services through community networks
10. Measure, evaluate and report on all communications activities on a monthly basis

Strategic Priority 3

Media and Public Relations



We will build trust and reputation through proactive, consistent and trustworthy information that responds to issues and community priorities.

Key priorities

1. Build and maintain strong relationships with media to facilitate informed reporting
2. Promote Port Stephens with positive and proactive media
3. Work across the organisation to identify newsworthy stories
4. Respond promptly to media enquiries to meet news deadlines
5. Develop annual Community Advocacy Priorities and implement campaigns to drive awareness of key priorities
6. Build relationships with key decision makers in state and federal government to increase understanding of local issues
7. Seek opportunities for elected members or executive to speak at corporate, community and networking events
8. Coordinate Councils emergency management communications
9. Improve media information management
10. Monitor, evaluate and report on all media and public relations activity on a monthly basis

Measures of success



Community Satisfaction Survey

49%+ of our community feel they can provide input into decision making
53%+ of our community are satisfied with their contact with Council



Port Stephens Liveability Score of 66+



1 million+ website visits



Have Your Say members increasing at 2.5% annually



Participation demographics accurately represent our community



Facebook followers increasing at 2.5% annually



Instagram followers increasing at 2.5% annually



LinkedIn followers increasing at 2.5% annually



e-newsletter subscribers increasing at 2.5% annually



30% of projects have an engagement level of 'involve' or above



80%+ employee engagement

Attachment 1 Community Participation Plan

Community Participation Plan

It is a statutory requirement for councils in New South Wales to prepare a Community Participation Plan that sets out how and when it will undertake community participation when exercising relevant planning functions under the EP&A Act.

How is community participation carried out

The Community Participation Plan specifies requirements including notification and public exhibition. This can include:

- Giving written notice to neighbours, individual landowners or occupiers.
- Advertising on Councils website.
- Making documents publicly available online.

Other methods may be used for notification and exhibition on a case by case basis and depending on statutory requirements.

If the exhibition period is due to close on a weekend or public holiday we may extend the exhibition to finish on the first available work day. In accordance with the planning legislation, the period between 20 December and 10 January (inclusive) is excluded from the calculation of a period of public exhibition.

Plans or applications cannot be made or determined until after the minimum period of public exhibition. If a longer timeframe is placed on public exhibition, the matter cannot be determined until after the specified period.



Making a submission

The community can participate during public exhibition by making a submission. The planning legislation sets out some requirements for submissions. In addition to these requirements, when making a submission to Council, the submission should be:

- Received on or before the last day of the nominated timeframe for exhibition.
- Made in writing (through the mail, email or hand delivered to Council).
- Contain the name and address (or email address) of the person making the submission.
- Include the application number for reference (for development applications) or the name of the exhibited planning matter.
- Include a statement of objection or support and reasons.

Community participation requirements

Under the EP&A Act, the following minimum community participation requirements apply to local planning functions:

Table 2

Mandatory timeframes	Minimum community participation requirement
Division 1 — Schedule 1 to the EP&A Act	
Draft community participation plans	28 days
Draft local strategic planning statements	28 days
Planning proposals for local environmental plans subjects to a gateway determination	28 days or as specified by the Gateway Determination
Draft development control plans	28 days
Draft contributions plans	28 days
Division 2 — Schedule 1 to the EP&A Act	
Development Application for designated development	28 days
Environmental Impact Statement obtained under Division 5.1 (An Environmental Impact Statement prepared for certain development such as state significant development.)	28 days
Re-exhibition of any amended application or matter referred to above	The period (if any) determined by the person or body responsible for publicly exhibiting the application or matter.

Exhibition timeframes are measured in calendar days and include weekends.



Development applications

Table 3 outlines Council’s minimum notification requirements for development applications. Where there is an inconsistency between the notification requirements of this Community Participation Plan and legislative requirements, the legislative requirements will prevail.

Table 3 Community Participation Categories (Refer to Appendix A for details)

Exhibition types	
Type	Requirements
A	Not Notified Development Council may at its discretion decide to notify any of this type of development that may significantly impact on the amenity of adjoining land owners.
B	Advertised Development Written notification in accordance with 'type B' requirements and an advertisement published on Councils website. Development Application (DA) information published on DA Tracker. Additional advertisements may be placed in newspapers and/or through such other mechanisms as may be appropriate to ensure that the public is reasonably aware of the proposal. Council may also at its discretion decide not to advertise insignificant development.
Not included in Table 1	Notified Development A 14 day notification period will apply for development types not included in Appendix A. Written notification will be sent to all owners of land directly adjoining or opposite the development site. Additional owners and occupiers may be notified at the discretion of Council staff. Council may at its discretion decide not to notify development where impacts on adjoining land owners are considered minor in nature.

Modification applications

The need or otherwise to notify an application to modify a development consent will be undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Act and Regulations or at the discretion of Council in consideration of the nature of the modifications proposed.

Appendix A — exhibition periods

Development category	Exhibition types	
	A	B
Rural development		
Agriculture	✓	
Farm buildings	✓	
Forestry		✓
Residential accommodation		
Dwelling — single storey	✓	
Residential ancillary (for example sheds, pools)	✓	
Rural worker's dwellings	✓	
Secondary dwellings	✓	

Development category	Exhibition types	
	A	B
Commercial development		
Home business / occupation	✓	
Entertainment facilities		✓
Function centres		✓
Sex services premises / home occupation (sex services)		✓
Restricted premises		✓
Community and entertainment facilities		
Places of public worship		✓
Recreation facility (major)		✓
Industrial development		
General industry	✓	
Industrial retail outlets	✓	
Industrial training facilities	✓	
Light industry	✓	
Storage premises	✓	
Warehouse or distribution centres	✓	
Freight transport facilities		✓

Development category	Exhibition types	
	A	B
Subdivision (all types of subdivision)		
Strata subdivision	✓	
More than 10 Torrens or Community title lots		✓
Tourist and visitor accommodation		
Caravan parks and camping grounds		✓

Development category	Exhibition types	
	A	B
Miscellaneous		
Boatshed	✓	
Electricity generating works	✓	
Environmental facilities / environmental protection works	✓	
Moorings / mooring pens	✓	
Signage — other than advertising structures	✓	
Extractive industries / open cut mines		✓
Air transport facility		✓
Airstrip		✓
Cemetery / crematorium / mortuaries		✓
Correction centre		✓
Helipad		✓
Marinas		✓
Passenger transport facilities		✓
Port facilities		✓





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