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MISSION: SUSTAINABLE MANLY

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ABSTRACT

Manly, the gateway to Sydney’s Northern Beaches, is a major destination for local, interstate and overseas visitors. The well-renowned beach and associated culture, waterways and the local bushland are highly valued by the local population, but like major destinations around the world they are coming under increasing pressures of human use. The challenge of managing these pressures for the benefit of both visitors and the community is one which Manly Council faces through a strong and ongoing commitment to sustainability. This paper focuses on the journey from an initial 1995 Manly Conservation Strategy to the most recently updated Manly Sustainability Strategy – an overarching policy document that guides all aspects of Council’s work and its interactions with the local community.

Beginning with a long-term vision for Manly as “A vibrant and inclusive community which values its heritage and works together to create a sustainable lifestyle and environment for all to enjoy”, the Strategy is structured around five key themes: A safe and cohesive Manly, A natural Manly, A living Manly, An involved Manly and A well governed Manly.

KEYWORDS: Pathway to sustainability, UN Melbourne Principles, Manly

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Sustainability Strategy in context

For more than 150 years Manly has been both a village which is home to a local community that is strongly attached to and protective of its place and at the same time a seaside resort to which visitors from near and far (63% from within Australia) flock. These visitors come to enjoy the vast expanses of golden sand and the associated beaches – both with their big surf and with the gentle lapping of the waters of Sydney Harbour.

Manly is currently an increasingly cosmopolitan tourist destination, with a rich history and heritage enjoyed by a population of just under 40,000 people, and as many as 6 million

visitors each year. When asked what they value most about Manly, residents consistently identify among the most important of Manly's qualities, both the local beaches and waterways, and the pockets of natural bushland that occur across the area. Covering an area of only 15.2km², Manly sits at the gateway to both Sydney Harbour and the long peninsula known as the Northern Beaches. Manly has a limited commercial and industrial base, with the local economy being heavily reliant on tourism.

2. SUSTAINABILITY: THE JOURNEY IN BRIEF

In the 15 years since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, Manly Council has been on a journey – a journey that some would call a 'mission' to become a sustainable community. The Local Agenda 21 Action Plan for Sustainability adopted at the global Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992 served as a catalyst for Manly Council to commit to a local Conservation Strategy. Between 1995 and 1998, when it was adopted by Council as a core policy document, Council worked closely with the local community to develop its initial Conservation Strategy.

Structured to reflect and support mandatory State of the Environment reporting, the Manly Conservation Strategy contained chapters each of which focused on an aspect of Manly's resources – land, aquatic systems, biodiversity, air, waste, noise, Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Heritage and a chapter devoted to the social environment. The 1998 Conservation Strategy provided a sound basis for embarking on the journey to sustainability, and was of sufficient merit to see it distributed to all Councils in NSW, and to win for Manly both state and national awards for its introduction and implementation.

Recognising that the concept and practice of 'sustainability' was evolving rapidly in the latter part of the 1990s, Manly Council had included in the Conservation Strategy a commitment to 3-4 yearly update reviews.

By 2001, when planning for an initial review of the Conservation Strategy commenced, both Council and its Sustainability Strategy Management Group had acknowledged the need to look beyond the strong environmental focus of the Conservation Strategy and to produce a Sustainability Strategy that recognised both the social and environmental aspects of Local Agenda 21 along with Council's normal economic considerations.

After an extensive desktop research and community consultation process which included community events in each of the 12 community precincts across the Local Government Area, Council staff and the Sustainability Strategy Management Group produced an updated Manly Sustainability Strategy. Strong links between the Sustainability Strategy and the now-mandatory Social Plan, saw the 2002 Manly Sustainability Strategy more closely reflect the intention of Agenda 21 to integrate protection of the environment and development in ways that respect the role of people in a sustainable society.

When the second review and update of the Manly Sustainability Strategy was due in 2006, the greatest challenges recognised by Council staff responsible for its implementation, and by the Sustainability Strategy Management Group, were:

- The need to overcome a perception that the Sustainability Strategy was the responsibility of the Natural Resources team in Council and at times of little relevance or concern to others

- The importance of integrating the work of different sections for Council to progress sustainability outcomes (overcoming ‘silos’ in thinking and action)
- Further integrating the social aspects of Council’s operations with the economic and environmental considerations (moving to real ‘triple bottom line’ operations)
- Embedding the Sustainability Strategy as a driver of Council policy and decision-making

3. THE 2006 REVIEW OF THE MANLY SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

This review began with a clear objective of addressing these challenges.

3.1 Renewing our understanding of community values

Given more than 10 years had passed since the preparatory work for the Manly Conservation Strategy, and significant socio-demographic and other changes had occurred in the area in that decade, the Management Group decided that it was timely to begin the review process with a community engagement project to re-assess what the community values about Manly. In an attempt to engage those members of the community not already actively involved in sustainability thinking, the project was conducted as a competition in which entrants were asked to express in artwork, photography, poetry, prose or other art form, the experiences, places and things that make Manly special.

The MyManly competition was a successful event and attracted strong interest from professional and amateur artists, ranging in age from seniors to early primary school students. While Manly’s beaches and the ocean, the bushland and its wildlife remain a strong focus, there was also an increased emphasis on cultural values. Swimming, snorkelling, sea and surf sit side-by-side with enjoyment of the relaxed cosmopolitan lifestyle and the art and heritage of the Manly area. Together these are the characteristics that make Manly attractive to residents and visitors alike.

Shortly after the completion of the MyManly competition, Council resolved to undertake a broader review of the vision for the future of Manly. The Manly Futures Forum, and preparatory work for it, brought together Council, community and business in the area. Seeking to address the challenges of maintaining Manly’s unique natural environment and lifestyle while also addressing increasing population pressures, the dialogue of the Futures Forum was structured around five key themes: social and cultural change; the future of arts, recreation, leisure and tourism; eco-initiatives; how ‘on-line’ Manly should be; and what individuals can do to foster good outcomes for Manly’s future.

The 2-day Futures Forum, in which more than 100 local residents participated along with technical experts in each of the identified theme areas, resulted in Surfing the Future: A Vision for the Manly Local Government Area in 2025, which is built around 6 key themes which emerged from the Futures Forum (see Table 1)

With both the MyManly and Surfing the Future outcomes to hand, Councillors and senior staff completed a 1-day workshop during which they briefly reviewed Council’s Corporate Plan and updated the Vision for Manly. In 1994 Manly’s vision was defined, through a series of community workshops, as

A thriving community where residents and visitors enjoy a clean, safe and unique natural environment enhanced by heritage and lifestyle.

As a result of the MyManly and Surfing the Future projects, this vision has been revised so that it is now

A vibrant and inclusive community, which values its heritage and works together to create a sustainable lifestyle and environment for all to enjoy.

3.2 Providing a framework that encourages integration

As noted earlier, relevant staff and the Manly Sustainability Strategy Management Group were also keen to restructure the Manly Sustainability Strategy in ways that would assist in overcoming the ‘silo’ approach to management of Council business. A literature review and dialogue with other local government areas known to be leaders in sustainability, brought a decision to use the United Nation’s ‘Melbourne’ Principles for Sustainable Cities (Table 1) as a basis for the restructured Strategy, thought to be the first in Australia to do so.

As the Sustainability Strategy review process progressed it became increasingly clear that the Melbourne Principles, while providing an excellent framework against which to develop the updated Manly Sustainability Strategy, could also be reshaped to better align with the themes developed in Futures Forum process. These realigned principles represented a Manly-specific version of the Melbourne Principle, thus providing an international validated point of reference with strong local significance and community ownership, as summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. UN Sustainability Principles and themes for Manly

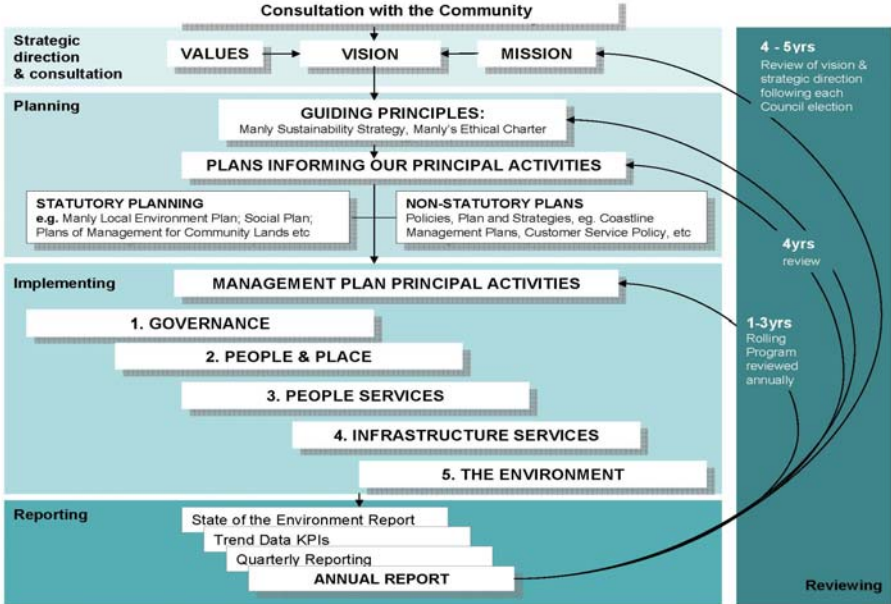
Surfing the Future Vision Themes	Manly Sustainability Strategy Themes	United Nations Sustainability Principles
	A Long Term Vision for Manly	1. A shared long-term vision for Manly based on: sustainability, intergenerational, social, economic and political equity; and our individuality.
A Living Manly A Visitor Friendly Manly An Affordable Manly	A Safe and cohesive Manly	2. Achieve long-term social and economic security .
A Natural Manly	A Natural, Sustainable Manly	3. Recognise the intrinsic value of Manly’s geodiversity, biodiversity and natural ecosystems , and protect and restore them. 4. Enable Manly’s community to minimise our ecological footprint . 5. Promote sustainable production , through appropriate use of environmental sound technologies and effective demand management.
A Moving Manly	A Living Manly	6. Build on the characteristics of ecosystems in the development and nurturing of a healthy and sustainable Manly . 7. Recognise and build on the distinctive characteristics of Manly, including its human and cultural values, history and natural systems .
	An Involved Manly	8. Empower people and foster participation . 9. Expand and enable cooperative networks to work towards a common, sustainable future.
A Well Governed Manly	A Well Governed Manly	10. Enable continual improvement , based on accountability, transparency and good governance .

The Manly Sustainability Strategy 2006 is a ‘roadmap’ to guide the development of Manly for today and for future generations.

3.3 Engaging staff in all areas

The policies and programs are now in place to embed ‘sustainability’ as a core part of Council business. This is reflected in Council’s Management Plan (2006) where the Manly Sustainability Strategy is seen as a key driver of Council’s business, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Place of Manly Sustainability Strategy in Council policy and operations



Whilst this may seem a somewhat insignificant achievement, Council staff recognise that this high-level policy position allows the objectives of the Strategy to infiltrate and influence all operations and business of Council.

Staff in the Natural Resources branch have developed and maintained inclusive processes that have built awareness and ownership of the Strategy across all sections of Council. The journey from Manly’s 1998 Conservation Strategy, through the 2002 Sustainability Strategy to the 2006 Sustainability Strategy, has seen increasing integration of environmental, social and economic considerations.

4. POSITIVE INFLUENCES: CATALYSTS TO SUSTAINABILITY IN MANLY

A number of factors have exerted positive influence on this progression.

4.1 The Environment Levy

In 1995 Manly residents voted in favour of the introduction of an Environment Levy as a special rate set at 7.05% of the general rates at that time, to enable the implementation of new works “of an environmental nature” which meet a set of broad criteria. Generating approximately \$1 million per annum for environmental works, this Levy has enabled Council to attract both State and Federal funding for projects which required matching funds, and in so doing has made possible numerous major projects that would not otherwise have been done. Initially introduced on a trial basis, more permanent application of the Levy received support from 63% of voters at the 1999 Local Government election.

4.2 The Sustainability Strategy Review Mechanism

Every four years, the Sustainability Strategy is fully reviewed under the leadership of the community-based Management Group. This important process allows a step back to assess progress in implementation, updating to best practice, reinvigoration and renewal of awareness and enthusiasm, bringing new Council staff on board with the importance of the Strategy, and enabling a renewed approach and importance. Each update adopted by Manly Council (2002 and 2006) has seen a marked step forward in our sustainability thinking and action. The renewed momentum generated alone is more than worth the relatively minor cost of the review.

4.3 Growth in significance of the environment and the human dimension

In 1996 a small Manly Environment Centre was established and in 1997 Manly Council appointed a temporary Conservation Officer to prepare a Manly Conservation Strategy. The commitment of those staff and a more general growth in environmental awareness and commitment has seen growth in the relevant sections of Council to a point where the staff directly contributing to sustainability now includes 10 educators, 10 environmental scientists, four strategic planners whose work includes a strong sustainability element, and a Social Planner, as well as an expanded Environment Centre.

4.4 Continuity & renewal of key committed staff

The Conservation Officer appointed in 1997 has retained primary responsibility for the Strategy, and its implementation and regular reviews. As co-author of this paper she is now Manager of the Natural Resources Branch, with a team of enthusiastic and professionally well-qualified specialist staff. During that time this staff member has completed a Masters degree focusing on local sustainability. This research has been applied, integrated, and to some extent professionally peer reviewed within each Sustainability Strategy review. It has also played a part in the formation of the Baton Forum for Sustainability – a network of local practitioners committed to sustainability within their own organisations (see www.batonforum.org.au). Working with the Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW, the Baton Forum has recently secured over \$1.5m of grant funding to assist NSW Councils with sustainability planning.

As part of ensuring that the Strategy's implementation is entrenched in Council business and not dependent on any particular individual, servicing the community-based Management Group has recently been handed to the Sustainability Planner.

4.5 Professional partnership between staff & elected 'champions'

The skills and ongoing professional interests of the servicing officer are complemented by those of the Strategy Management Group's chair, a Councillor who has professional training in several relevant disciplines and whose career for the past 20 years has been in the sustainability arena. A close professional working relationship, based on shared understanding and commitment to a sustainable Manly, and supported by Senior Management has provided leadership and guidance, bringing together scientific and technical expertise and community perspectives. It also enables a 'no surprises' approach to even the most challenging aspects of the Strategy's review and implementation. Professional dialogue, challenges to thinking behind the initiatives taken and collaborative effort all assist in ensuring that the Strategy remains strong, even in the face of external pressure for a focus on more specific one-off projects.

4.6 A Scientific Advisory Panel

Since 1998 Manly has been fortunate to retain the *pro bono* services of a diverse range of scientists with professional skills relevant to the development, implementation and review of the Sustainability Strategy and projects arising from it. Several of these professional specialists have been involved in the process from its beginnings, and all have a good understanding of the challenges that Manly faces in progressing towards a sustainable future. (further information is available at www.manly.nsw.gov.au/Scientific-Advisory-Panel.html)

4.7 Management Plan Preparation

Council's Management Plan is now prepared in the Corporate Planning and Strategy Division, which includes the Natural Resources Branch. The Branch significantly shapes and contributes to the content and structure of the Plan which ensures that it and the programs and activities that it drives are heavily influenced by sustainability, which in turn drives Council's operations.

4.8 Support from & involvement of senior management

All this would not be possible without the support and involvement of senior management within Council. The General Manager actively engaged with the review process, and willingly accepted challenges put to him by the Natural Resources staff. This support is backed by support from several of the other members of the senior management team.

5. THE CHALLENGES REMAINING

Continuing challenges that face those who are primarily responsible for ensuring the implementation of the Manly Sustainability Strategy range from the local and operational to the global.

5.1 Staff turnover

While staff understanding of and commitment to the Manly Sustainability Strategy has grown considerably since 1996, Manly Council, like other local governments around Australia, experiences a relatively high turnover of staff in various areas. This presents challenges in maintaining awareness of and skills and commitment relevant to the implementation of the Strategy, both within the Natural Resources team and perhaps more importantly in other disciplines of Council

5.2 The increased role of OH&S and risk management in public sector operations

Over recent years the Australian workplace has experienced substantial growth in emphasis on Occupational Health and Safety issues and in local government there is also a growing need to address risk management as a core part of daily business. As a consequence, practical issues such as replacement of manual cleaning of public places with a broom (with its contingent risk of shoulder injury for outdoor workers) with the use of a mechanical sweeper bring negative comment from sustainability-aware sectors of the community. Finding the right balance in addressing these issues remains an ongoing challenge.

5.3 Maintaining community engagement

As the issues faced in moving to a sustainable future become more complex and as a consequence the Manly Sustainability Strategy and/or its supporting documents become larger and more technically based, maintaining community engagement presents a growing challenge. However this is largely offset by an increased general awareness of sustainability issues and by the use of a community summary of the Sustainability Strategy document.

5.4 The 'crisis' of climate change

In the past year climate change has assumed such a high profile position in environmental thinking that it risks swamping more strategic approaches and integrated consideration of issues. In an area as dependent on its beaches as Manly is, there is perhaps a particular challenge for local government with its relatively limited resources, high expectations from an alert and aware community, and limited staff who risk being spread thinly across their responsibilities as they struggle to maintain a balance between competing demands. Such demands come from many different parts of the community without a concomitant increase in resourcing to support those demands.

5.5 Monitoring and evaluation

From a professional perspective, perhaps the greatest challenges ahead lies in monitoring and evaluating performance against the Strategy. Identifying appropriate indicators that are relevant both scientifically and to the community, and resourcing adequately the monitoring and evaluation needed to optimise outcomes is an essential part of the challenge of moving towards a truly sustainable Manly.

6. CONCLUSION

Manly Council and its community have made significant progress in Mission: Sustainable Manly. The journey into new places is at times challenging, but at the same time progress is rewarding for those involved, whether on Council staff, among elected representatives, or in the wider community.

Manly has often been identified as a leader in local sustainability, but as for everyone else learning and continual improvement remain essential. Both elected representatives and Council staff on the journey to sustainability are eager to gain new knowledge and to benefit from the experiences of others, especially as the challenges of sustainable living at times seem ever-more demanding.

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