

Annual Report 2020 – 2021



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ABBREVIATIONS	
BASP	Business Activity Strategic Plan
BO	Biosecurity Officer
CLR	Councillor
DPI	Department of Primary Industries
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
GIPA	Government Information (Public Access Act) 2009
GM	General Manager
LLS	Local Land Services
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NEWA	New England Weeds Authority
NT	Northern Tablelands
RWC	Regional Weed Committee
SOE	State of the Environment
SBO	Senior Biosecurity Officer Weeds
UNE	University of New England

1. CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

It has been both a pleasure and an honour to have represented the New England County Council as Chairman during 2020/2021 and I am pleased to present Council's Annual Report for that period.

Our success is measured on how well Council achieves the objectives and operational tasks set out in the Business Activity Strategic Plan, Delivery Program and Annual Operational Plan, together with the importance of community engagement.

We have maintained our strong financial position even after an operating loss this year, due to unplanned consultant fees and termination payments.

In implementing the final year of our 4 Year Delivery Program and Annual Operational Plan I am pleased to report that our Council has performed very well, being proactive in approaching and meeting the objectives of the programs for weed management and control in the New England region.

Our Council continues to be a leader in regard to weed management and control not only across the region but is also recognised State wide for its initiative, innovation and hard work. We continue to be a major innovator and participant in the north and north western regions and in State wide priority weed management.

In meeting the challenges of the past year I would like to thank Council's staff for their support of Council, and for their dedication and commitment to their work in delivering the outcomes in weed management and control services to Council's area.

Finally, I extend my sincere appreciation to the Deputy Chairman, Councillor Scott Kermode and the other Councillors for their support and hard work both within this and their constituent Councils, as well as in the community.

I consider it a privilege to introduce the New England County Council Annual Report for 2020 - 2021.



Clr Mark Dusting
Chairperson



2. INTRODUCTION

This year has been a time of challenge, change, renewal and growth.

A major highlight of the year was Glen Innes Severn Council (GISC) joining the County as a Constituent Council, after 4 years of participation under a Memorandum of Understanding.

On 16 December 2020, GISC was proclaimed as a new constituent member of the County, increasing the size of our operational area to 23,742 square kilometres.

This will see increased benefits for both our Authority and Glen Innes Severn Council through economies of scale, better utilisation of resources and the ability to enhance a regional strategic approach to weed management and control across our respective areas.

With changes in legislation from the Noxious Weeds Act 1993 to the Biosecurity Act 2015, the New England Tablelands (Noxious Plants) County Council has updated its legislated name to the New England County Council, after 73 years of operation.

With the change of name to the New England County Council it was time to update the logo for a fresh start.

With this fresh start, NEWA will be purchasing land at the new Armidale Airside subdivision and building a customised depot and training centre in 2021.

From an operational point of view the year has been challenging. COVID19 pandemic restrictions had a significant impact on our operational and extension program, where property inspections were postponed, and many shows and field days, including Agquip were cancelled.

Additionally, NEWA suffered significant staff shortages and turnover of senior staff during the period. As an organisation we have prioritised improvement in our policies and procedures, workplace health and safety, and risk management.

Through these challenges our staff demonstrated resilience and perseverance, and were instrumental in developing the new workplace structure and policy reviews.

The Northern Tablelands region has experienced greater than average rainfall during the reporting period. This increased seasonal growth of pastures and accompanying invasive weeds resulted in a significant workload for staff in weed control and project work during this period of significant challenges. The ability of the NEWA team to continue to provide high-quality service to our region can be attributed to the professionalism and commitment of staff; a core reason why NEWA is so highly regarded throughout the region.

Concentrated efforts have continued on a number of priority weeds found in our area with a focus on Tropical Soda Apple, particularly in the Macleay Valley, Serrated Tussock in the northern and southern regions of Council's area, as well as Blackberries and St Johns Wort. These invasive priority weeds pose a significant threat to the agricultural viability of the region.

NEWA works closely with other like Authorities including the Local Land Services (LLS) authorities of the Northern Tablelands, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and Landcare, covering our region. NEWA's reputation for achieving targeted outcomes through good management, as well as getting the job done on time and within budget, has enabled securing further funds from these organisations.

In conclusion, I would like to express my appreciation to Councillors for their guidance, and fellow NEWA staff for their professionalism and resilience during the year.

Heather Apps
Business Manager

3. ANNUAL REPORTING ON PROGRESS

Annual reporting to the community is an important part of transparent and accountable local government. Council is required under the legislation to prepare an Annual Report as one of the key points of accountability between Council, its member Councils and the community.

The Annual Report focuses on Council's implementation of the Delivery Program and Operational Plan. The report also includes information that is prescribed by the Local Government (General) Regulation 2005, including provisions relating to the content of Council's annual statement of revenue policy.

The Business Activity Strategic Plan must be reviewed every four years. From 2012, each newly elected Council must complete the review by 30 June in the year following the local government elections and roll the planning period forward by at least 4 years so that it is always a 10year minimum plan.

A report on the progress on implementation of the Business Activity Strategic Plan must be presented at the final meeting of an outgoing Council, relating to the effectiveness of the Plan in achieving its environmental, economic, social and civic leadership/governance objectives over the past four years.



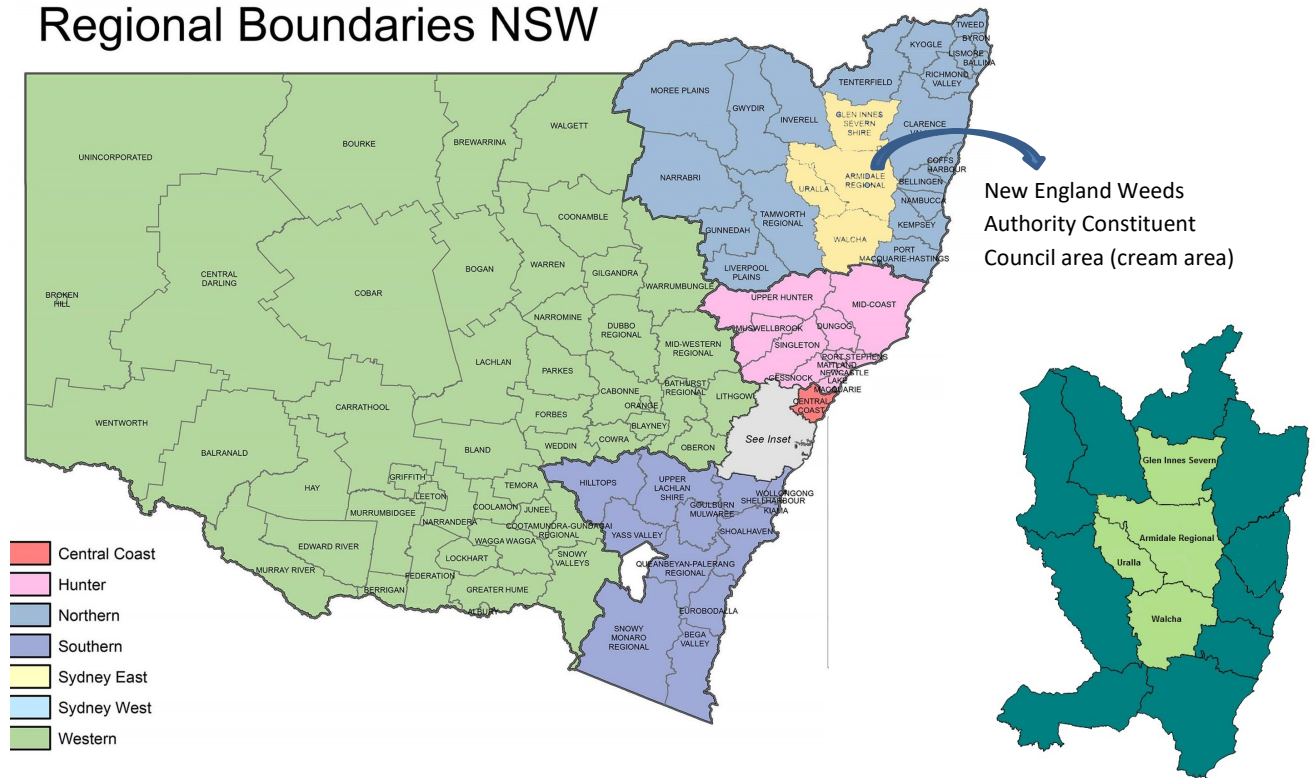
New England Gorge Country

4. NEW ENGLAND WEEDS AUTHORITY REGION – PROFILE

The New England County Council trading as the New England Weeds Authority area comprises the constituent member local government areas of Armidale Regional Council, Uralla Shire Council and Walcha Council which forms part of the Great Dividing Range and New England Plateau.

The following Map 1 indicates the County Council’s member councils and adjoining council areas.

Regional Boundaries NSW



Map 1: NSW Local Government regions and Member Councils of the New England County Council

a. Area

The New England County Council covers some 18,255 km² (Armidale Regional 8,630km², Uralla 3,215 km², and Walcha 6,410 km²) stretching from Ben Lomond in Armidale Regional Council in the north to Nowendoc in the Walcha Council in the south, west to Bundara in Uralla Shire and east to Ebor in the Armidale Regional Council area.

On 1st January 2021, Glen Innes Severn Council joined the New England County Council (previously under an MOU), increasing the area by a further 5,487 sq. km, increasing the northern region to include the areas of Glen Innes and villages of Deepwater, Emmaville, Glencoe and Red Range.

b. Climate

Climatic conditions in the region range from sub humid temperate to cool temperate climates with snow falling on some occasions. Elevation ranges from just below 1,000m to just over 1,300m above sea level, with pleasant warm summers, extended spring and autumn seasons and a long cold winter period.

Rainfall in the region averages from 700mm to 1,200mm annually with approximately 60% falling in the summer and 40% falling in the winter, however the previous year has yielded much lower than average rainfalls.

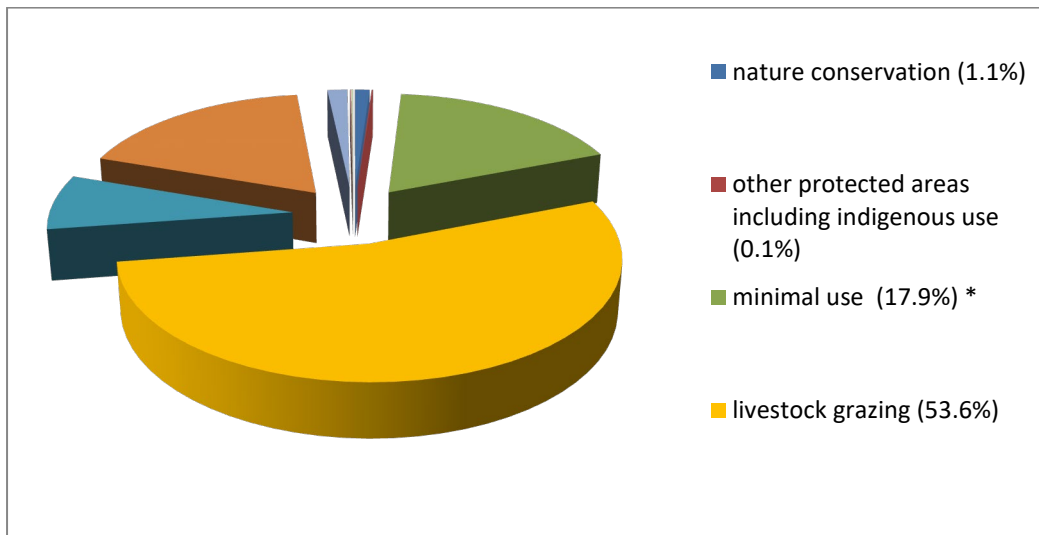
c. Population breakdown

The total population for the County Council's area is 49,060¹ which is broken down into member Council areas of Armidale Regional 30,710, Uralla 6,310, Walcha 3,132 and Glen Innes Severn 8,908.

d. Landuse patterns

The following chart summarises the landuse patterns according to the Australian Natural Resources Atlas for the County Council region. The majority is devoted to livestock grazing (53.6%) and dryland agriculture (18%), reinforcing the significance of the regions economy being based on agricultural pursuits and highlighting the importance to the area of weed management and control. Only a small portion of this land area (0.1%) is devoted to urban and residential use.

¹ 2016 Census



**Minimal use: encompasses reserved crown land (stock routes, defence reserves and mine reserves) and vacant and institutional crown land. Also includes private land with open or closed native forest with unknown use (most likely remnant native cover).*

Chart 1: Land use patterns in the New England Weeds Authority area.

5. COUNCIL'S VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

a. Council's Vision

To protect the natural environment, agricultural activities, the economy and community from the impacts of priority and invasive weeds within the New England and Northern Tablelands region of NSW.

b. Council's Mission

To be recognised as a leader in the weed management and control industry by our member Councils and the community.

c. Council's Corporate Values

Our Business & Partnerships – managing all aspects of our business in a transparent and sustainable manner while providing best value for money to our member Councils, the community and partners.

Our Community – providing a weed management and control service in a way that is accountable to the community/stakeholders and supports our constituent Councils' regional community plans in natural resource management.

Our Employees – developing staff committed to quality, professional team work and safety, while striving for continuous improvement and accepting personal responsibility.

Our Customers – meeting the needs and expectations of our customers.

Our Relationships – being open, supportive and constructive in all our relationships.

Our Environment – conserving resources, protecting and enhancing our agricultural and natural environment.



A regional rapid response to Tropical Soda control work in the Macleay, 2020.

6. COUNCIL'S RESPONSIBILITIES

As an organisation the County Council is constituted under the Local Government Act 1993 and is specified as a local control authority under the *Biosecurity Act 2015*. It is a single purpose authority formed to administer and control declared priority and invasive weeds, and has been operating since 1947. The County Council is fundamentally responsible for weed control of gazetted or priority weeds including:

- Ensuring landholders/occupiers of private land fulfil their obligations under the *Biosecurity Act 2015*.
- inspection of land within their area in connection with priority and invasive weeds;
- enforcing the control of priority weeds as per the legislative requirements;
- weed management on land occupied by the council and on roads in their area;
- publicity about weeds declared in the area;
- proposing changes to priority weed declarations;
- developing, implementing and co-ordinating local strategies and policies;
- providing on-going approved training and professional development for weed staff and
- providing adequate resources to implement priority and invasive weed programs.

Got weeeeds? Get WeedWise.

NSW DPI Weed 2021 campaign

In addition, the County Council is the Co-ordinator on behalf of the Northern Tablelands Regional Weed Committee for the implementation of the NSW Weeds Action Program 2020 - 2025 (WAP1520) funded by the State Government through the NSW Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI), for the reporting period.

The Regional Weed Committee covers the three (3) member local government areas of Tenterfield, Inverell and NEWA [Armidale Regional, Uralla Shire, Walcha and Glen Innes Severn Councils] in the Northern Tablelands (NT) region, comprising some 40,000 km² of the New England region of NSW, as detailed in the NT Weed Action Business Plan 2015 -2020, these duties have been extended within the region to build a capacity to:

- identify and manage high risk weed species and entry pathways;
- develop and implement early weed detection capabilities;
- assist in the timely detection of new weed incursions;
- affect a quick response to eradicate or contain new weeds;
- identify and prioritise weed management programs to where benefits are greatest;
- provide effective and targeted on-ground weed control;
- increase community acceptance of, and involvement in effective weed management;
- integrate weed management into education programs;
- improve the knowledge base for Biosecurity Officers by providing current educational material and opportunities and by setting a public example;
- monitor progress of the NSW Invasive Species Plan's implementation and
- encourage the use of cost-sharing arrangements.

Central to meeting the abovementioned duties and responsibilities is the implementation of a consistent, co-ordinated and co-operative approach to regional weed inspection and control programs.



Cats Claw Creeper control – Crown Lands private work

7. MEMBERS OF COUNCIL 2020-2021

The New England community is represented by five (5) Councillors from the constituent Councils of Armidale Regional (3 members), Uralla Shire (1 member) and Walcha Council (1 member), under the leadership of an annually elected Chairperson.

The Councillors have provided strong leadership in the advancement of the County Council's Business Activity Strategic Plan 2017 - 2027 as part of their commitment towards achieving the strategic objectives contained within the Plan.

Councillor Representatives from 1 July 2020 to December 2020



Chairperson
Clr Mark Dusting
Uralla Shire Council
(to June 2021)



Deputy Chairperson
Clr Scott Kermode
Walcha Council
(to June 2021)



Viv May – Armidale Regional
Council Administrator
(to Nov 2020)

Councillor Representatives from January 2021 – June 2021



Clr Andrew Murat
Armidale Regional Council



Clr John Galletly
Armidale Regional Council



Clr Margaret O'Connor
Armidale Regional Council



Clr Carol Sparks
Glen Innes Severn Council

a. Facilities provided to Councillors

The following fees and expenses with regard to the Chairperson and Councillors were paid during 2020 -2021:

Fees and Expenses	Amount
Chairpersons Allowance	\$6,242.00
Councillor Fees	\$12,979.27
Miscellaneous expenses (conferences, accommodation & catering)	\$624.96
Interstate and Overseas Travel	Nil
Total	\$19,846.23

Due to COVID19 restrictions, the NSW Local Government Conference was held on-line this year.

All costs associated with attendance at conferences and seminars were in accordance with Council's adopted Payment of Expenses Policy.

No vehicle, equipment or communication expenses were incurred by the Chairperson or Councillors during the reporting period.

b. Councillor attendance at Council Meetings 2020 – 2021

Councillor	Ordinary Meetings (5 held)
Clr Mark Dusing	5/5
Clr Scott Kermode	5/5
Viv May	2/2
Clr John Galletly	2/3
Clr Andrew Murat	2/3
Clr Margaret O'Connor*	3/3
Clr Carol Sparkes**	3/3

*from 14 December 2020

** from 1st January 2021



Tropical Soda Apple control – Upper Macleay Valley

8. OUR ORGANISATION

New England County Council trades as the New England Weeds Authority (NEWA). The General Manager, whose position is part-time, is the most senior employee of Council. The General Manager is selected and appointed by Councillors on a renewable fixed-term performance based contract for a maximum of five years.

The following chart shows the organisational structure from 1 July 2020 to 9 March 2021;

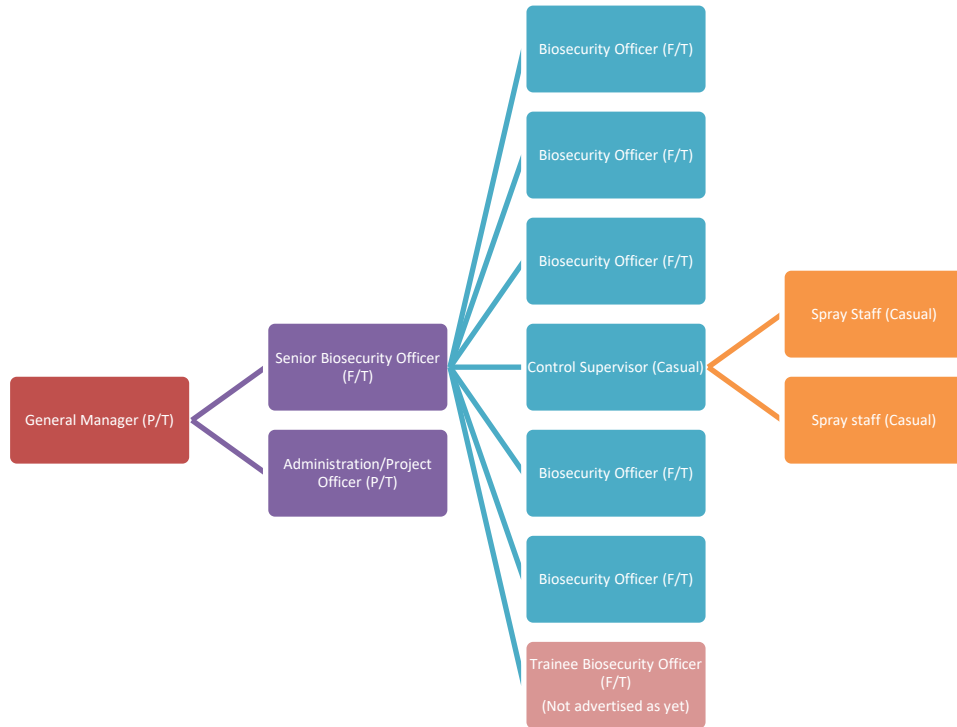


Chart 2: NEWA Organisational Structure

A review of this structure was required to diversify the operations, the responsibilities and the workloads. The staff workshopped a proposed structure at a meeting held on 15 February 2021, and formulated the following:

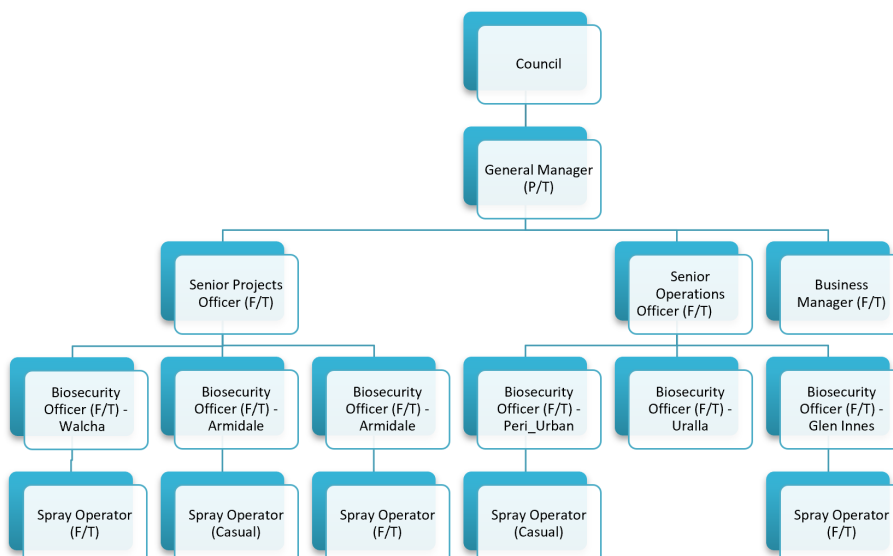


Chart 2: Updated NEWA Organisational Structure – Adopted by Council in March 2021

The new structure splits the supervision and management of other staff between the Senior Operations Officer and the Senior Projects Officer. This enables a more diversified approach to management and responsibilities and also provides the opportunity for the senior offices to cover both roles in times of leave. This also provides a co-ordinated approach to achieve organisation goals and responsibilities.

The new structure also adds an additional Biosecurity officer. We have noted over recent times that we cannot keep ahead of the current work commitments let alone supporting project work. The new officer will support the projects officer in current and future projects, generating sufficient income to cover position costs. We currently have projects totalling in excess of \$350,000 to be completed by June 2022.

9. THE BUSINESS ACTIVITY STRATEGIC PLAN 2017 – 2027 OVERVIEW

The Business Activity Strategic Plan (the Plan) identifies Council's and the communities main priorities and aspirations for the future, addressing strategies for achieving the objectives in relation to priority and invasive weeds management and control across our constituent member Council areas, so as to improve agricultural sustainability, primary industry productivity and to deliver broad environmental outcomes for the New England region for the next ten years.

The Plan is the foundation for the Annual Operational Plan, Four Year Delivery Program and Resourcing Strategy comprising the Ten Year Financial Plan, Workforce Strategy and the Asset Management Plan.

In meeting the outcomes of our Plan, Council has a long term focus that addresses issues about environmental, economic, social and civic leadership objectives as well as reflecting the community engagement processes that have been undertaken by our constituent Councils.

Early on in their processes, formal approaches were made to each Council to be involved in their respective community engagement activities and appropriate input to the environment sections in the development of their Community Strategic Plans. This partnering in the community engagement process has been most helpful in developing Council's Business Activity Strategic Plan.

Council, as a small single purpose organisation has been mindful of its resource capacity and has acted prudently to deliver the outcomes identified in the current year of its plan.

Annual reporting to the community is an important part of transparent and accountable Local Government. Council is required under the legislation to prepare an Annual Report as one of the key points of accountability between Council, its member Councils and the community.



10. THE DELIVERY PROGRAM REPORT 2017-2021

The dynamic nature of priority and invasive weed species means that Council's approach to weed management and control is constantly evolving. Through its strategic objectives and principal activities, Council will continue to improve the services it provides to the community in a range of ways including effective governance, strategic planning, environmental management and economic sustainability.

Council's approach to weed management and control also reflects the objectives of the NSW Invasive Species Plan 2015 – 2022 and NSW Weed Action Program 2015 -2020. As a result, the Business Activity Strategic Plan provides the following direction as to how our resources will be employed to achieve the following four strategic objectives:

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE S.O.1

PREVENTING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW WEED SPECIES IN OUR REGION - EXCLUDE

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE S.O.2

ELIMINATE OR PREVENT THE SPREAD OF EXISTING AND NEW WEED SPECIES IN OUR REGION – ERADICATE OR CONTAIN

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE S.O.3

REDUCE THE IMPACTS OF WIDESPREAD INVASIVE WEED SPECIES – EFFECTIVELY MANAGE

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE S.O.4

ENSURE COMMUNITY, INDUSTRY AND GOVERNMENT STAKEHOLDERS HAVE THE ABILITY AND LONG-TERM COMMITMENT TO MANAGE INVASIVE SPECIES – BUILD CAPACITY

To achieve these strategic objectives our actions are centered on the following strategies:

- identification and management of high-risk weed species and the pathways they utilize within our region;
- formulation of weed detection systems to improve our capacity to find new weeds early;
- ensuring we have the resources and procedures in place to undertake strategic weed control measures and rapid response against new weed incursions;
- continual analysis of our weed management programs to ensure we are directing resources to where benefits will be the greatest and
- increasing the community commitment and involvement in proactive weed management and control approaches.

Our approach to weed management and control has strong linkages with the Australian Weeds Strategy, the NSW Biodiversity Strategy, NSW Invasive Species Strategy and the NSW Weeds Action Program.

At a regional level our Business Activity Strategic Plan is interconnected with the Northern Tablelands Local Land Services Regional Weed Committee Business Plan 2020 - 2025 and regional Management Plans developed for specific weeds.

Through negotiations with the respective LLS's, an agreement was reached whereby NEWA remained the Lead Organisation for the Northern Tablelands Local Land Services region for funding under the NSW DPI NSW Weeds Action Program 2020 - 2025 (WAP 2025).

Our Council acted as the co-ordinator for the Northern Tablelands Regional Weed Committee in the implementation of the NSW Weed Action Program for the reporting period.

Successful weed management relies on co-ordinated effort, strong partnerships and pro-active approaches. Our Council is working in unison with other organisations to ensure our limited resources are utilized more efficiently and effectively. Leading this approach are our staff who are committed towards achieving success in a wide range of integrated weed management and control programs.

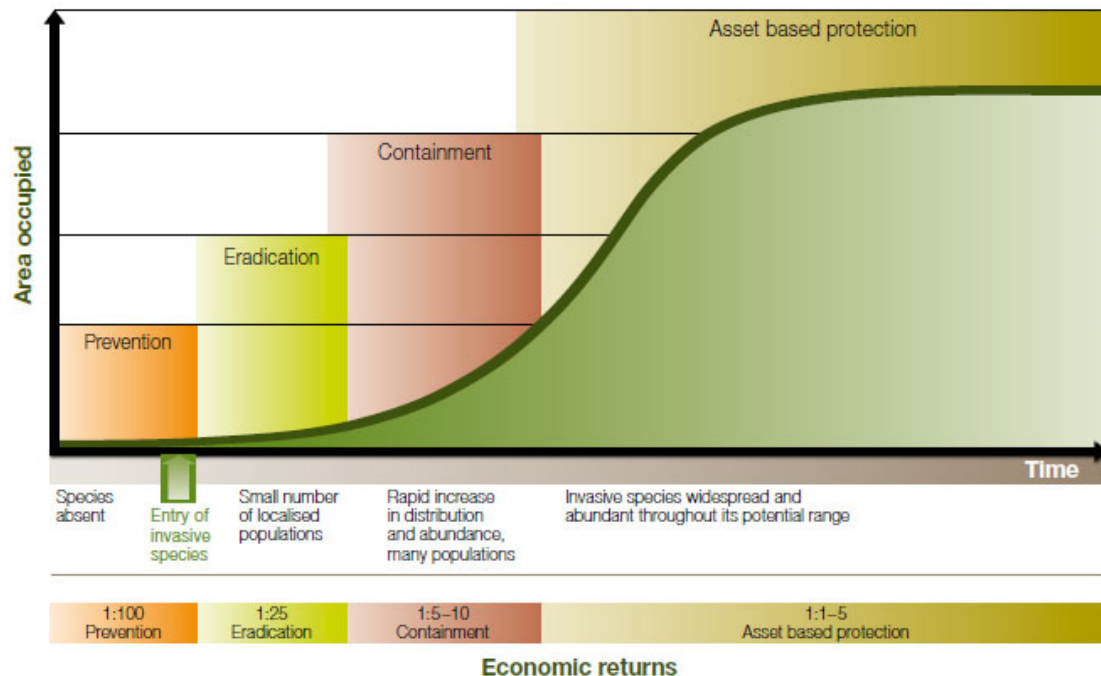


Chart 3: Weed Invasion Curve²

The diagram above shows the application of these goals to a stylised weed invasion curve, demonstrating that return for investment is highest in the early stages of weed invasion when management is focussed on prevention and eradication. For example, there is an estimated return on investment of \$100 for every \$1 spent in the prevention stage of management.



NEWA Staff in action.

² NSW DPI



Serrated Tussock



St Johns Wort



Nodding Thistle



Blackberry



Chilean Needle Grass



Tropical Soda Apple



Salvinia



Bridal Creeper

Some of the priority weeds in the NEWA region

11. PRINCIPAL ACTIVITIES

The Business Activity Strategic Plan principal activities provide a framework for the co-ordinated and co-operative management and control of priority and invasive weeds across our County Council area for the ten year period of the Plan 2017 – 2027.

The Strategic Objectives are translated into actions through the principal activities to be undertaken by the Council to implement the strategies established by the Plan within the resources available under the Resourcing Strategy.

A summary of principle activities undertaken by Council and the objective/s under each are detailed as follows.

PRINCIPAL ACTIVITY - P.A.1. CIVIC LEADERSHIP/GOVERNANCE / ADMINISTRATION / FINANCE / RISK MANAGEMENT

Civic Leadership/Governance

To provide effective, relevant civic leadership and local governance through community consultation, availability of information to the public and Council, public access to Councillors and liaison with member Councils and relevant government agencies.

Administration

To implement financial and administrative policies and procedures to allow the management of all Council activities in a manner that ensures the economic sustainability of the Council and protects Council and community assets.

Finance

To provide the framework for Council to undertake its activities in a financially responsible and economically sustainable manner that protects Council and community assets.

Risk Management

To minimise Council's exposure to risk and provide a safe working environment for staff, contractors and for county landholders.

PRINCIPAL ACTIVITY- P.A.2 ENVIRONMENT - PRIORITY WEED MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL

Priority Weed Management and Control

To act in a regulatory and advisory role to stakeholders and landholders to improve the agricultural and natural environment through a reduction in priority and invasive weeds species.

PRINCIPAL ACTIVITY- P.A 3 ECONOMIC AFFAIRS – PRIVATE WORKS AND OTHER BUSINESS UNDERTAKINGS

Private Works

To provide a contract spraying and inspectorial service to generate revenue and to assist landholders and government agencies to control priority and invasive weeds.

Other Business Undertakings

To promote the interests of County Council stakeholders through active interaction and participation with other authorities (such as the Northern Tablelands Regional Weed Committee, North West Regional Weed Committee, Local Government NSW and Local Land Services) through advocacy and political pursuits.

PRINCIPAL ACTIVITY- P. A 4 NSW WEEDS ACTION PROGRAM

To act as the lead agency for the implementation of the NSW Weeds Action Program for the member Councils of the Northern Tablelands Regional Weed Committee (including NEWA).



Spray season at NEWA is a busy time.

DELIVERY PROGRAM 2017 - 2021

Principal Activity - P.A.1. Civic Leadership/Governance / Administration / Finance / Risk Management

Functional Objective: (Civic Leadership/Governance)

To provide Council with the knowledge, skills, information and opportunity to make informed, relevant and timely decisions.

Strategic Tasks: To assist and inform the Chair and Councillors so that they can be proactive spokespeople on priority and invasive weed issues affecting the Council and community.

Summary of Measurable Outcomes achieved 2020 - 2021

- Reports for Council's consideration prepared in a concise and timely manner with recommendations.
- All statutory financial plans and returns completed and lodged by due date.
- Councillors informed of legislative changes in a timely manner.
- Media releases and invitations to public events circulated to Councillors.

Functional Objective: (Administration)

To promote and improve public awareness of Council's activities and operations.

Strategic Tasks: To increase the public use of Council's office in Armidale and contact with property owners/ stakeholders.

Summary of Measurable Outcomes achieved 2020 - 2021

- Target contact with new property owners achieved.
- Attendance at field days, agricultural shows, Landcare and regional events achieved.
- Council office in Armidale manned during business hours.
- Media release targets exceeded.
- Staff directly involved in implementing regional Local Land Services and Landcare projects with the community.

Functional Objective: (Administration)

To work with elected members and staff to ensure the development and effective implementation of Council's Business Activity Strategic Plan, policies and decision making.

Strategic Tasks: To provide well informed Councillors, Council staff and community in relation to Council's business activities, policies and strategic directions.

Summary of Measurable Outcomes achieved 2020 - 2021

- Review of Council's policies undertaken and reaffirmed by Council.
- Annual Operational Plan, Four Year Delivery Program and Long Term Resourcing Strategy reviewed and updated.

Functional Objective: (Administration)

To maintain a stable, secure administrative structure with supporting internal controls, reporting systems, training plans, record keeping and documentation to ensure that human and physical resources needed to deliver Council's services are available and accountable.

Strategic Tasks: To provide ongoing training for Council staff to raise the standard of service provided to the community and to enhance their working experience.

Summary of Measurable Outcomes achieved 2020 - 2021

- Corporate Training Plan reviewed, updated and implemented.
- Staff meetings held as required.
- Work Health and Safety Procedures and systems reviewed and updated.
- Work Health and Safety Management Policy and handbook reviewed and updated.
- Council's Workforce Strategy reviewed and updated.

Functional Objectives: (Finance)

To ensure finance, accounting and administration requirements are performed in a professional and timely manner.
To ensure the provision of finances to the Council are received from relevant sources.

Strategic Tasks: Accounting practices carried out to meet statutory requirements and relevant accounting standards.
Ongoing financial support is provided from member Councils and other appropriate agencies.

Summary of Measurable Outcomes achieved 2020 - 2021

- Statutory Financial Plans and returns completed and lodged by due date in accordance with accounting standards and Code of Accounting Practice.
- Constituent member Councils provided with Annual Report and Financial Statements - audit undertaken by Audit Office of NSW.
- Constituent member Councils provided with Annual Operational Plan.
- Annual grant funding secured from NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) under the NSW Weeds Action Program 2020 -2025
- Annual Financial Statement and Acquittal documents provided to NSW DPI within set time frame.

Functional Objectives: (Risk Management)

To minimise the risk associated with all functions of Council.

Strategic Tasks: Management of Council's risks in order to control, minimise or eliminate all forms of potential loss.

Summary of Measurable Outcomes achieved 2020 - 2021

- Enterprise Risk Management Policy and Strategy reaffirmed by Council and Enterprise Risk Management Matrix reviewed and updated.
- Council's Investment and Long Term Financial Strategies reviewed and updated.
- Risk Management Action Plan reviewed in consultation with Council's insurer's Statewide Mutual.

DELIVERY PROGRAM 2017 – 2021

Principal Activity- P.A.2 Environment - Priority Weed Management and Control

Functional Objective: Priority Weed Management & Control

To inspect private properties for priority and invasive weeds and support property owners and managers to encourage them to work with Council to identify and control priority weeds.

Strategic Tasks: To improve natural resource management within the region relating to priority and invasive weeds and maintain the viability of agricultural and high conservation value land.

Summary of Measurable Outcomes achieved 2020 - 2021

- Annual inspection figures were not reached this year due to the ongoing drought conditions. Privet inspections in urban areas were targeted during this incredibly dry period. The weed control program targets were however achieved.
- As part of the Authority's three year rolling inspection program inspections of high risk sites, high risk pathways and high risk areas were carried out over one third of the Authority's area. As a result no new weed incursions were found, however, new infestations of high risk species already present within the Authority's area were the subject of ongoing control programs (eg Tropical Soda Apple in the Macleay Valley).
- Chairman's Annual tour postponed due to drought conditions.

Functional Objective: (Priority Weed Management & Control)

To ensure that property owners appreciate the importance of weed control and reinforce Council's resolve to achieve property owner support for weed control.

Strategic Tasks: Through compliance with the provisions of the Biosecurity Act 2015 be proactive in reducing the threat of priority weeds to agricultural land and high conservation areas.

Summary of Measurable Outcomes achieved 2020 - 2021

- Council again adopted a policy of engagement, education and co-operation with landholders and land managers to have work carried out on their land to manage weeds, this has resulted in there being no requirement to issue Biosecurity Directions, on the spot fines or instigate legal proceeding. During the period Council legislative requirements transferred from the Noxious Weeds Act 1993 to the Biosecurity Act 2015
- There were 382 Compliance requests issued during the reporting period;
 - Glen Innes Privet – 141
 - ARC Privet – 236, Blackberry – 4, St Johns Wort – 1 Total ARC – 241
 - Uralla Privet – 2
- 46 Section 64 Certificates were issued.

Functional Objective: (Priority Weed Management & Control)

To use efficient record keeping and reporting techniques that support Council's weed inspection and control operations and fulfill Council's grant performance-target obligations.

Strategic Tasks: To maximise the use of current and new software and IT hardware to record and map weed inspections.

Summary of Measurable Outcomes achieved 2020 - 2021

- Council continued to use Intramap software to record electronically weed management, inspections and control data, which is compliant with NSW DPI Biosecurity Information System reporting requirements.

Functional Objective: (Priority Weed Management & Control)

To raise the skill & knowledge base of land owners so that they understand the importance of weed control and are more competent in the identification and control of priority weeds.

To find effective ways to manage and control priority weeds.

To investigate and develop better ways to manage and control priority weeds.

Strategic Tasks: To increase landowner knowledge and awareness of priority weed issues in the region through extension based activities.

Summary of Measurable Outcomes achieved 2020 - 2021

NEWA staff carried out landholder capacity building and extension activities at:

- 4 agricultural shows in the area (Uralla cancelled due to COVID19)
- 6 field days;
- 17 Landcare events;
- Agquip was cancelled due to COVID19

There were 160 contacts made with Landholders to give advice and information in relation to weed management and control matters.

Functional Objective: (Priority Weed Management & Control)

To develop plans, policies, procedures and guidelines for priority weed management and control that are in keeping with industry best practice, meet State Government requirements and provide staff with a standard and consistent process for weed management.

Strategic Tasks: To identify areas of Council's operation and processes that need to be reviewed or where documentation needs to be written.

Summary of Measurable Outcomes achieved 2020 - 2021

- A review of Council's weed management plans, policies and procedures manual was undertaken, with updating of safety data sheets, engagement of contractors and safe workplace method statements.
- Compliance with pesticide notification plan obligations under the NSW Pesticides Regulation 2009 was met

Functional Objective: (Priority Weed Management & Control)

To treat weeds on Council controlled or managed land in a programmed manner.

Strategic Tasks: To improve the natural environment and agricultural viability of land through a reduction in noxious weeds.

Summary of Measurable Outcomes achieved 2020 - 2021

The following activities were carried out within the Authority's area:

- The inspection of 112 High Risk Sites;
- 2,140 Private Property Inspections completed covering 287,393 hectares;
- 22,986 kms of High Risk pathway inspections (roadside and waterways) completed covering 45,972 hectares;

The Authority's regional inspection program fully supported the NSW Weeds Action Program to eradicate or contain high risk species within the Authority's area.

The following highlights the ongoing weed control activities carried out within the Authority's area during the period.

- All known Nodding Thistle sites treated in November;
- All known Chilean Needle Grass roadways treated in November;
- All known St John's Wort roadways treated in November/ December;
- Priority Blackberry roadways were treated in December/March
- The Macleay Valley, Tropical Soda Apple roadways treated as required;

Wet weather, staff shortages and the ongoing Covid 19 Pandemic meant roadsides were controlled on a priority basis.
Staff involved worked exceptionally well to complete the majority of the control program

DELIVERY PROGRAM 2017 - 2022

Principal Activity - P.A 3 Economic Affairs – Private Works and Other Business Undertakings

Functional Objectives: (Private Works)

- To generate additional revenue.
- To maximise the use of Council's resources when not required for core business activity.
- To provide owners of small holdings with an affordable option for noxious weed control.

Strategic Tasks:

To carry out control works that reduces priority and invasive weeds on private property.

To investigate and develop ways to increase the revenue of Council from sources other than the annual State Government Grants.

Summary of Measurable Outcomes achieved 2020 - 2021

- During 2020 – 2021 the Authority was successful in funding applications to the Northern Tablelands Local Land Services amounting to a total of \$61,660 and \$410,654 from the Federal Government.
- Private works were carried out on behalf of Constituent member Councils, other Councils, Crown Lands and smaller property owners who are not otherwise equipped to carry out the spray control programs. The total of private works for 2020 – 2021 period amounted to \$117,614.

Functional Objective: (Other Business Activities)

To facilitate inter-governmental relations to ensure maximum cooperation between the County Council, Federal, State and Local Governments and their agencies.

Strategic Tasks: Promote and develop relationships with constituent Councils, Federal, State and other agencies and comply with statutory requirements.

Summary of Measurable Outcomes achieved 2020 - 2021

- Constituent member Councillors provided with Council Business Papers, Agendas and Minutes.
- General Manager's of each constituent Council provided with minutes of Council meetings.
- Constituent Councils provided with draft Annual Operational Plan for comment.
- Constituent Councils provided with Annual Report.
- Constituent member Councillors provided with Business Activity Strategic Plan 2017-2027, and Four Year Delivery Plan 2017 -2021.
- Applications to Local Land Services Authorities for natural resource management projects.
- Letters to State and Federal Members on weed management and control issues.
- Input to Constituent member Councils State of Environment reports.
- Participated in joint staff training activities with Constituent Councils where appropriate.

DELIVERY PROGRAM 2017 - 2021

Principal Activity- P. A 4 NSW Weeds Action Program – Northern Tablelands Regional Weed Committee (NTRWC)

Functional Objectives: (NSW WAP)

To work with inter and intra regional organisations that are involved in weed management and control to minimise the impact of priority and invasive weeds within the region.

Strategic Tasks: Implement the NTRWC Business Plan and Participant Agreement, NSW Weeds Action Program 2020 - 2025 as it relates to Council's responsibility.

Summary of Measurable Outcomes achieved 2020 - 2021

- Three meetings with Northern Tablelands Local Land Services (NTLLS) as regional coordinator for the NSW Weeds Action Program 2020 – 2025 (WAP 2025)
- All functional activities and objectives of the Weeds Action Program and responsibilities of the Regional Weed Coordinator were completed in accordance with the outcomes set during the reporting period.
- Active participation in the NTRWC.

Functional Objectives: NSW WAP 1520

To act as WAP regional coordinator in the implementation of the NSW Weeds Action Program 2020 - 2025 for member councils for the NTRWC Region

Strategic Tasks: Oversee the operation and implementation of the NSW Weeds Action Program in the NTRWC region.

- **As part of the NTRWC Weeds Action Program 2020 - 2025 all high risk weeds species and high risk pathways have been documented and inspected within the New England Weeds Authority area.**

The following activities were carried out within the Northern Tablelands area:

- The inspection of 244 High Risk Sites;
- 2809 Private Property Inspections completed covering 518,712 hectares;
- 29,148 kms of High Risk pathway inspections (roadside and waterways) completed covering 77,087 hectares;

12. OTHER PROJECTS

The New England Weeds Authority continues to work closely with the NSW Department of Primary Industries, local Landcare and Local Land Services Authorities in regards to weed control projects within the region.

During 2020 – 2021 the following projects were carried out to the value of \$472,314;

- Northern Tablelands LLS Gondwana Grasses variation - \$61,660
- Communities Combating Pest and Weed Impacts During Drought Program - Biosecurity Management of Pests and Weeds – Round 2 - Combating the State Priority Weed Tropical Soda Apple in the Macleay Valley during prolonged Drought conditions (MOU between NEWA and Armidale Regional Council) - \$410,654



Gondwana grasses project in action.

13. EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY (EEO)

Council is committed to the principles of equal opportunity for all of its employees and this is reflected in its Equal Employment Opportunity Policy (EEO Policy).

The EEO Policy recognises the right of employees to be treated fairly and without discrimination in the workplace. This includes situations such as applying for a position, selection for a position, training, promotion, transfers and dismissal. It provides that people should be selected on merit, regardless of race sex, marital status, disability or sexual preference.

14. EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

New England Weeds Authority seeks to encourage a co-operative and harmonious working environment for its staff. Interactive staff meetings deal with a wide cross section of issues relating to work and management practices, risk management, education and extension programs, and matters arising from the implementation of the Local Government State Award and the Work Health and Safety Act.

The Corporate Training Program was reviewed in 2020 so as to allow staff to continue to develop to a highly competent and professional standard.

Staff training included 5 staff members enrolled in Cert IV courses, 6 staff Remote Pilot License (RPL), 2 staff sub 25kg RPL, together with all mandatory training updates.



Northern Tablelands Biosecurity Officers received their Remote Pilot Licenses during the year.

15. MISCELLANEOUS REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

a. Major Contracts and Tenders awarded by Council 2020 - 2021

There were no contracts of service or contracts awarded by Council during the reporting year.

b. Legal costs incurred by Council

There were no legal proceedings either taken by or against the Council in 2020 - 2021.

c. Work carried out on Private Land

Council undertook various private works in relation to weed control on private land in 2020 – 2021, with all costs being borne by the property owner.

Council sets out separate charges for private works that are outlined in Council's fees and charges schedules. These rates are generally similar to contractor rates as Council does not wish to unfairly compete with private enterprise.

d. External Bodies exercising functions delegated by Council

Glen Innes Severn Council - Delegation of Weed Functions to New England Weeds Authority Memorandum of Understanding.

Following a request from Glen Innes Severn Council in February 2015 to carry out their responsibilities for weed management and control under the provisions of the *Biosecurity Act 2015*, a Memorandum of Understanding has been entered into whereby NEWA has assumed these responsibilities from 1 July 2015.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1993 – PROCLAMATION

On 16th December 2020, The Honourable Margaret Beasley AC QC, Governor of New South Wales, with the advice of the Executive Council, and in pursuance of sections 397(1) and (2) of the Local Government Act 1993, hereby declared that on and from the beginning of 1 January 2021 the Proclamations in force constituting or varying the constitution of New England Tablelands (Noxious Plants) County Council are amended in the manner described in Schedule A below and in line with the provisions in Schedule B below.

Amendments to the constitution of New England Tablelands (Noxious Plants) County Council

The constitution is amended by:

- (a) changing the name of the County Council to New England County Council; and
- (b) varying the County Council's area of operations by increasing that area to include the whole of the local government area of Glen Innes Severn Shire; and
- (c) varying the number of persons who comprise the County Council's governing body by adding thereto one person to be elected from among the councillors of Glen Innes Severn Shire Council.

Facilitating provisions

1. First election

Glen Innes Severn Shire Council shall hold its first election to elect its member of the New England County Council's governing body within two months after this Proclamation comes into force.

2. Activities of Glen Innes Severn Shire Council in relation to weeds

(1) Anything done or omitted to be done by Glen Innes Severn Shire Council in exercising its functions as local control authority for weeds under the Biosecurity Act 2015 and having any force or effect immediately before the date this Proclamation comes into force, continues to have effect as if it had been done or omitted to be done by the New England County Council.

(2) Without limiting subclause (1):

(a) any approval order or notice given or made by Glen Innes Severn Shire Council in exercising its functions as local control authority for weeds under the Biosecurity Act 2015, and that had effect immediately before this Proclamation comes into force, continues to have effect as if had been given or made by the New England County Council, and

(b) anything commenced but not completed by Glen Innes Severn Shire Council in exercising its functions as local control authority for weeds under the Biosecurity Act 2015 may be completed or discontinued by the New England County Council.

e. Partnerships, Corporations, Trusts or other Joint Ventures

Council did not participate in or hold any controlling interests during the year in any Corporation, Partnerships, Trust or Joint Venture.

f. Remuneration of General Manager

The General Manager, whose position is part-time, is the only senior staff member and remuneration for the period to 12 March 2021 was \$52,901.08.

The General Manager's responsibilities include:

- Efficient and effective operation of the Council organisation and day to day management. This includes ensuring Council's decisions and policies are implemented;
- Appointing, directing and dismissing staff in accordance with the organisation structure and resources approved by the Council;
- Exercising other functions as delegated by the Council and
- The General Manager may, in turn, delegate functions to other staff.

An Acting General Manager was contracted full time from 15 March 2021 to 30 June 2021 for \$60,760 (inc GST).

g. Requests made to Council under the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009

Council received no requests for the release of information under the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (GIPA) during the 2020 – 2021 reporting period.

h. Public Interest Disclosures Report

The six monthly and annual reports were provided to the NSW Ombudsman in accordance with the Public Interest Disclosures Act 1994.

There were no public interest disclosures either made or received during the reporting period 2020 - 2021.

i. Code of Conduct

Council adopted a new Model Code of Conduct and Procedures in March 2021 based on the Division of Local Government's new Model Code of Conduct.

There were no Code of Conduct complaints made about Councillors or the General Manager during the reporting period 2020 - 2021.



Fireweed is moving up from the coast into the New England.

16. STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT REPORT

State of the Environment (SoE) reporting is a key mechanism for assessing progress towards sustainability and implementing Ecologically Sustainable Development Principles, as Councils play an important role in environmental management.

Our Council in its 10 Year Business Activity Strategic Plan has recognised the importance of ecologically sustainable development principles in its principle activities relating to the management and control of priority and invasive weed species.

As required by legislation, each of our constituent Councils has prepared a comprehensive SoE report addressing the eight environmental sectors of land, air, water, biodiversity, waste, noise, Aboriginal heritage and non-Aboriginal heritage on a four year basis with supplementary SoE reports in intervening years.

Whilst our Council does not prepare a comprehensive SoE report, it does however, have direct connections with each of our constituent member Council's SoE reports and provides information on an annual basis for their reporting requirements in relation to the management of priority and invasive weed species.



Macleay Valley, Armidale Regional Council

**17. GENERAL PURPOSE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS –
YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2021**

