



November 2019

**Proposal to become part of a County Council:**

**Glen Innes Severn Council**

**New England County Council**



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The community of Glen Innes Severn Council seeks to become part of the New England (Noxious Plants) County Council area providing more efficient and effective processes for the management of the Biosecurity Act 2015 and priority weeds to meet the future needs of its residents.

## Introduction

This is a proposal to the Minister for Local Government under section 383(1) of the Local Government Act (1993) to amend the constitution of the *New England (Noxious weeds) County Council (Trading as the New England Weeds Authority (NEWA))* to include Glen Innes Severn Council. This proposal sets out the impacts, benefits and opportunities of the new council.

The creation of this County Council will bring under a single authority, communities with similar expectations in terms of the management of priority weeds.

The proposal has been informed by four years of operation under an MOU where Glen Innes Severn Council had delegated its noxious weeds functions (and subsequently its Biosecurity Act functions) to NEWA.

## Impacts, Benefits and Opportunities

The new council will provide enhanced scale and capacity to help it deliver on local biosecurity priorities.

## Next Steps

This proposal will be referred for examination and report under the Local Government Act (1993).

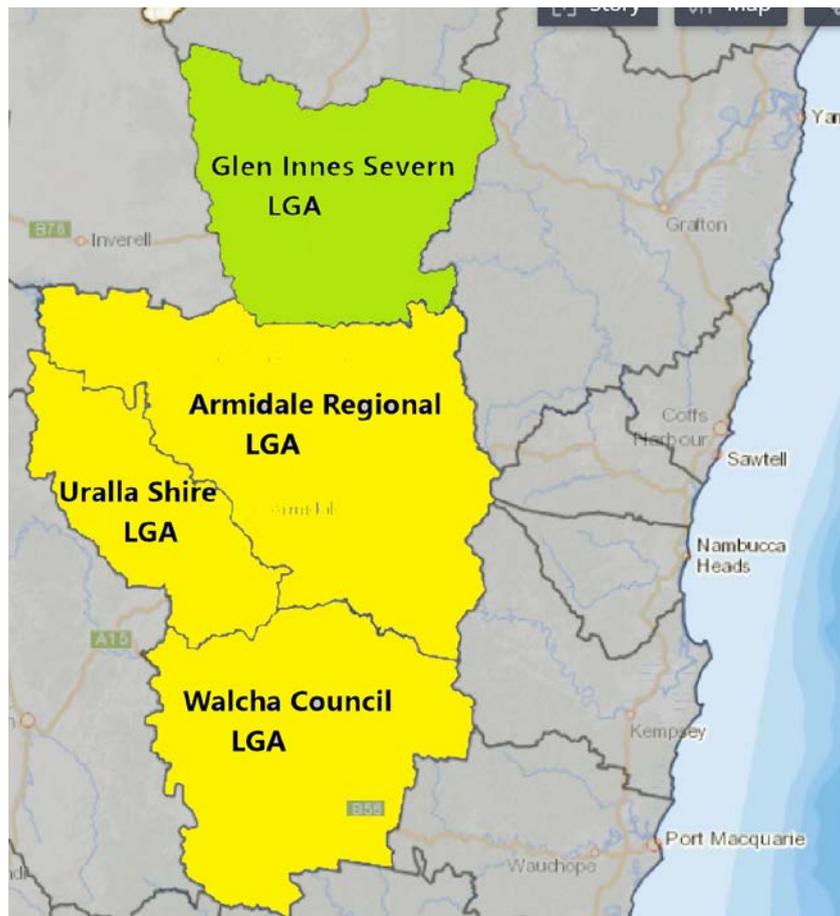
Local communities have an important role to play in helping ensure the new council meets their current and future needs for services and infrastructure and will have an opportunity to provide input on how the new council should be structured.

# INTRODUCTION

## This proposal has been informed by an extended Memorandum of Understanding

During 2015, Glen Innes Severn Council needed to examine a different option for meeting its obligations under the Noxious Weeds Act. The result of this review saw a Memorandum of Understanding with the New England Weeds Authority to undertake all noxious weeds functions of Glen Innes Severn Council. The Council delegated its Noxious weeds functions to the Authority and the memorandum was reviewed following the proclamation of the Biosecurity Act 2015.

The New England Weeds Authority has been meeting the obligations of both the Noxious Weeds Act and the Biosecurity Act for the Glen Innes Severn Council since July 2015. Both the Council and the County Council recognised the benefits of the memorandum and passed resolutions on 24 May 18 and 24 August 18 to make application to the minister to become members of the County. This proposal is the result of that resolution and subsequent advice from the Office of Local Government.



**Map 1: Existing NEWA Councils (yellow) and proposed Council (green).**

# BENEFITS, OPPORTUNITIES AND IMPACTS

The proposal enables the quality management of issues under the Biosecurity Act 2015 across all areas to be covered by the new Authority.

## Financial Benefits of the Proposed Merger

The proposal provides current and ongoing savings for both current entities and ensures the ongoing management of the biosecurity risks.

Gross savings over 20 years will primarily be due to:

- streamlining operations.
- better use of back office and administrative functions
- efficiencies generated through increased abilities to target new incursions,
- these reductions will be offset by a small increase in costs for Councillor fees.

In addition, the NSW Government may provide some seed funding to establish the expanded County.

The implementation costs associated with the proposal (for example information, communication and technology, office relocation, workforce training, signage and legal costs) have already been incurred with the implementation of the MOU between the two entities.

Benefits of the proposal could be reinvested to provide:

- improved services for all constituent councils.
- improved regional leadership for the management of biosecurity risks.

Under the current MOU, Glen Innes Severn Council contributes approximately \$95,000 annually, indexed by the rate increase. NEWA manages all biosecurity risks within the Glen Innes Severn Council area, employs and trains relevant officers and provides specialized equipment to control and manage any infestations.

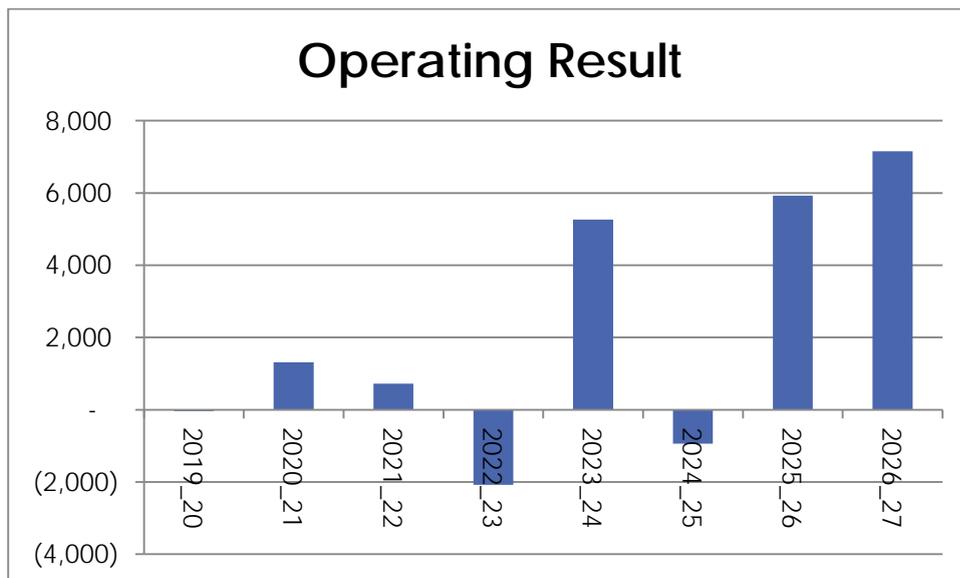
Costs for both Glen Innes Severn Council and all other constituent Councils will not change significantly from what is happening now. Glen Innes Severn Council will continue to incur a contribution to the county to be increased in line with rate pegging each year.

The expected contribution for each of the Councils is detailed below:

Council Contributions	2019_20 Budget	2020_21 Budget	2021_22 Budget	2022_23 Budget	2023_24 Budget	2024_25 Budget	2025_26 Budget	2026_27 Budget	2027_28 Budget	2028_29 Budget
Armidale Regional Council	201,603	205,635	209,748	213,943	218,222	222,586	227,038	230,444	233,901	238,813
Uralla Shire Council	81,476	83,106	84,768	86,463	88,192	89,956	91,755	93,131	94,528	96,513
Walcha Council	81,476	83,106	84,768	86,463	88,192	89,956	91,755	93,131	94,528	96,513
Glen Innes Severn Council	94,760	96,655	98,588	100,560	102,571	104,622	106,714	108,315	109,940	112,249
	459,315	468,502	477,872	487,429	497,177	507,120	517,262	525,021	532,897	544,088

**Table 1: Expected Contributions for each Council.**

The expected operating result of the new entity over the next 8 years is illustrated in below:



**Table 2: Expected Operating Result of new entity.**

The Local Government Act contains protections for three years for all council employees below senior staff level. Staff numbers will be retained as far as is reasonably practicable.

## Opportunities for Improved Services and Infrastructure

The efficiencies and savings generated by the proposal will allow the new council to invest in improved service levels and/or a greater range of services. Examples of service priorities that could be improved include:

- Better use of drone technology to improve inspection and spraying operations
- Faster and more effective responses to any new priority weed incursion.
- Partnership of a successfully managed organisation in relation to noxious weeds management, and therefore Glen Innes Severn Council becomes a part of a regionally strong and focused Council;
- Being guaranteed that funding to the Authority, and therefore weeds management and control, will be maintained at least at “rate pegging” increased levels;
- Maintaining the costs of service provision within the books of Council, with the ability to withdraw from the Authority dependent on the agreement between both parties;
- Continuation of a local weeds inspector; and
- Continued staff development and career development.

## Impact on Rates

There will be no impact on rates for any of the current or future constituent councils.

## Local Representation

It is suggested that the newly constituted entity comprise of six (6) Councillors, three (3) elected by Armidale Regional Council, and one (1) elected by each of the entities of Uralla Shire Council, Walcha Council and Glen Innes Severn Council.

The current council has 5 Councillors representing a population of 38,589 which equates to an average of 6,319 persons per Councillor. Glen Innes Severn Council has a population of 8,836, a figure reasonably close to the previous average and providing an entitlement to one (1) Councillor to represent it on the newly proclaimed New England County.

Council	Number of Councillors	Number of Residents (2016)	Residents per Councillor
Current New England County	5	38,589	6319
Add Glen Innes Severn Council	1	8,836	8836
<b>New Council</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>47,425</b>	<b>6948</b>

**Table 3: Expected number of Councillors on new entity.**

It is also suggested that the new proclamation call the County “New England County Council” and that the trading name of “New England Weeds Authority” be maintained.

# THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The current County Council area and Glen Innes Severn Council share common characteristics and issues in terms of weed management. The proposed extended council will have enhanced scale and capacity and be better placed to shape and deliver priority weeds management across its area

## Geography and Environment

The new area is part of the New England Tablelands and has similar climatic, geographic and environmental characteristics.

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.

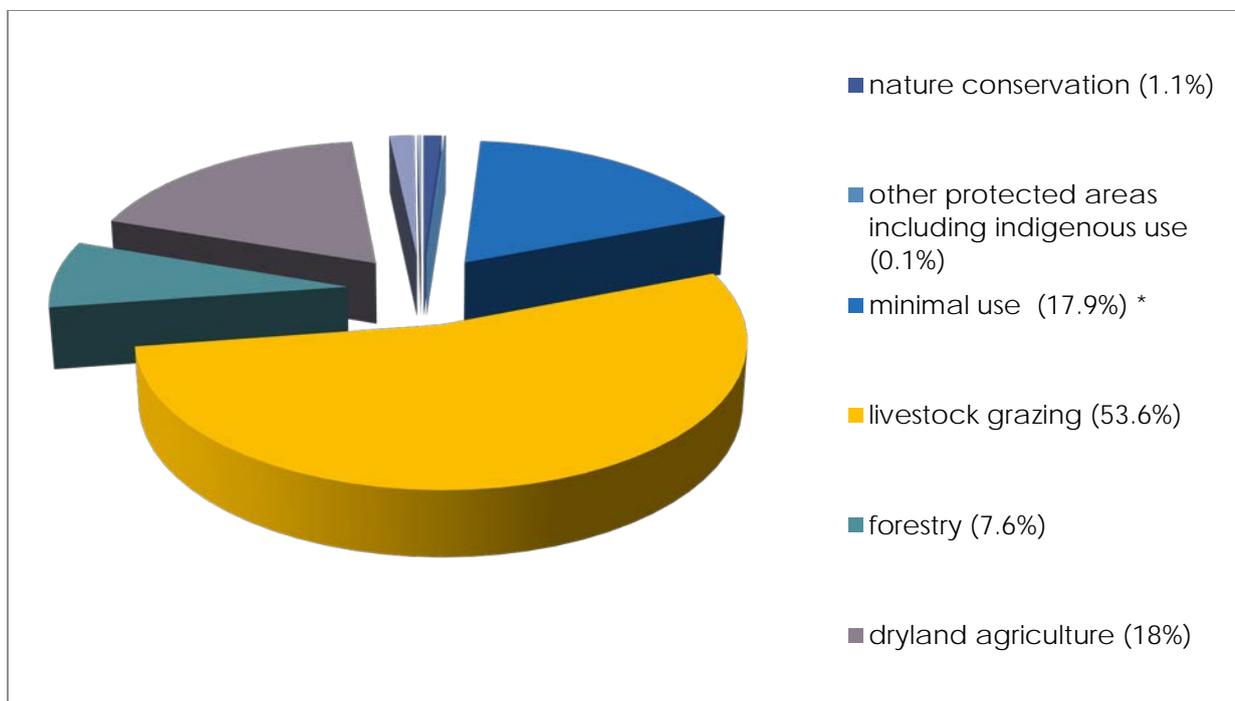


Chart 1: Land use patterns in the New England region.

## Shared Community Values and Interests

These communities are bound by their sense of place as part of the Northern Tablelands. Both communities are primarily agricultural and require sound weed management practices.

Weeds have major economic, environmental and social impacts in Australia, causing damage to natural landscapes, agricultural lands, waterways and coastal areas. Weeds impact severely on agriculture by competing with production, contaminating produce and poisoning livestock. Weeds also impact on biodiversity by out-competing native plants and degrading habitat. Weeds, along with other invasive species, now arguably pose one of the most significant threats to biodiversity. The County has since 2015 managed the biosecurity risks across both its area and the Glen Innes Severn area.

The New England Weeds Authority and Glen Innes Severn Council have already been collaborating in a number of ways. Some details over recent years include:

In the three (3) years, New England Weeds Authority Biosecurity Officers have carried out 1,401 private property inspections covering 215,255 hectares. Landowners were contacted where possible, inspections carried out and new and existing weed issues discussed.

NEWA also carried out 14 Extension Activities during the three (3) year period. NEWA has also developed a good working relationship with Glen Innes Natural Resources Advisory Committee (GLENRAC). A breakdown of the recent extension activities is outlined below.

Extension Activity	Council Area	Date Achieved
Farming/Family Information Sessions	Glen Innes	15 August 2018
GLENRAC Fit Farmers Day Ben Lomond	Armidale Regional/ Glen Innes	13 September 2018
Glenrac Spray Drift and Weed Management Workshop	Glen Innes Saleyards	10 April 2019
Glen Innes Show	Glen Innes 15th - 16th Feb	16 February 2019
Glenrac Farmer Update	Glen Innes	17 April 2019

**Table 4: Recent extension activities conducted by NEWA in Glen Innes Severn LGA.**

NEWA has a fleet of 10 spray units that are utilised for weed control activities throughout the area under its jurisdiction. As a result, this fleet and the staff can be deployed to various areas to ensure an effective roadside control program is carried out. In the Glen Innes Severn Council area, roadside weed control programs have been carried out on a yearly basis to treat the following weeds:

- Coolatai Grass (In areas not epidemic)
- Serrated Tussock-September
- Cape and English Broome- October
- Gorse-October
- Chilean Needle Grass- November
- St Johns Wort- November/December
- Blackberry- January to May
- Privet as found on roadsides

## Community Support

NEWA has been managing weeds in the Glen Innes Severn Council area since July 2015 under an MOU arrangement. In Glen Innes Severn Councils area, there were some early reservations from the community concerning Council's delegation of its weeds function to the NEWA. However, preliminary results of Council's 2018 External Customer Survey indicate an increase in satisfaction levels on weed control and management since the 2016 survey.

Additionally, the Department of Industry has endorsed this proposal in a letter attached stating:

*The Invasive Plants and Animals Unit of NSW Department of Primary Industries endorses the proposal by Glen Innes Severn Council to become a constituent of the New England Tablelands (Noxious Weeds) County Council.*

*A weeds county council has the following advantages:*

- *It enables a team of skilled staff to be assembled;*
- *Specialist skills in a range of technical fields can be built within the team;*
- *Staff can be concentrated to deal with new weed risks in a part of the county when necessary;*
- *It ensures specialist vehicles are fully utilised; and*
- *Larger herbicide orders increase purchasing power.*

*Should Glen Innes Severn Council become a constituent of the County, it will formalise the existing arrangement and provide for uniformity of public weed management across four of the six local government areas in the Northern Tablelands Local Land Services region.*

# CONCLUSION

This proposal to change the council area has the potential to provide a range of benefits to local communities, including:

- possible NSW Government funding to assist the implementation.
- improved services for all constituent councils.
- improved regional leadership for the management of biosecurity risks.
- greater efficiencies through the removal of back office and administrative functions, increased purchasing power of materials and contracts, all of which are expected, on average, to generate savings of around \$50,000 every year from 2020 onward;
- Building on the shared communities of interest and strong local identity across the area;
- providing effective representation through a council with the required scale and capacity to meet the future needs of the community; and being a more effective advocate for the area's interests and better able to deliver on priorities in partnership with the NSW and Australian governments.

# NEXT STEPS

Every community has an opportunity to help shape a new council for their area.

## Community Engagement

This proposal is referred to the Chief Executive of the Office of Local Government for examination and report under the *Local Government Act (1993)*. The Chief Executive may delegate this function to a suitably qualified person. The delegate will consider this proposal as required under the Act, including against statutory criteria and may hold a public inquiry. The delegate may also undertake public consultation to seek community views. The delegate is also required by the Act to provide the delegate's report to an independent Boundaries Commission for review and comment. The Minister for Local Government under the legislation may decide whether or not to recommend to the Governor that the proposal be implemented. For the factors a delegate must consider when examining a merger proposal (under section 263 of the *Local Government Act (1993)*), please refer to the Appendix to this document.

## Appendix

The following table outlines the factors that a delegate must consider under section 263 of the *Local Government Act (1993)* when examining a proposal. The section references outline where the criteria have been addressed in this proposal.

LEGISLATIVE CRITERIA	SECTION REFERENCE
(a) the financial advantages or disadvantages (including the economies or diseconomies of scale) of any relevant proposal to the residents and ratepayers of the areas concerned	Benefits, Opportunities and Impacts
(b) the community of interest and geographic cohesion in the existing areas and in any proposed new area	The Local Community
(c) the existing historical and traditional values in the existing areas and the impact of change on them	The Local Community
(d) the attitude of the residents and ratepayers of the areas concerned	The Local Community
(e) the requirements of the area concerned in relation to elected representation for residents and ratepayers at the local level, the desirable and appropriate relationship between elected representatives and ratepayers and residents and such other matters as it considers relevant in relation to the past and future patterns of elected representation for that area	Local Representation
(e1) the impact of any relevant proposal on the ability of the councils of the areas concerned to provide adequate, equitable and appropriate services and facilities	Benefits, Opportunities and Impacts
(e2) the impact of any relevant proposal on the employment of the staff by the councils of the areas concerned	Financial Benefits of the Proposed
(e3) the impact of any relevant proposal on rural communities in the areas concerned	The Local Community
(e4) in the case of a proposal for the amalgamation of two or more areas, the desirability (or otherwise) of dividing the resulting area or areas into wards	Local Representation
(e5) in the case of a proposal for the amalgamation of two or more areas, the need to ensure that the opinions of each of the diverse communities of the resulting area or areas are effectively represented	Next Steps
(f) such other factors as it considers relevant to the provision of efficient and effective local government in the existing and proposed new areas	Benefits, Opportunities and Impacts