



Social and Cultural Plan 2009 - 2014

Cessnock Local Government Area

Places, Spaces & Faces



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Executive Summary

Chapter One



Executive Summary

Cessnock City is located in the Hunter Valley, New South Wales (NSW) about 160 kilometres north of Sydney and 40 kilometres west of Newcastle. The Cessnock Local Government Area (LGA) encompasses a total land area of 1,950 square kilometres, of which a large proportion is State Forest and National Park. The estimated resident population for the Cessnock LGA is 49,888 people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Estimated Resident Population 2008).

Cessnock City Council's vision is for a safe, healthy environment where residents can enjoy a high quality of life. The Cessnock LGA of the future aims to offer quality lifestyle and security, local services, local jobs, an unspoiled environment, safety, convenience, comfort and confidence in the future.

Cessnock LGA residents can enjoy open spaces, green surrounds and a strong sense of community connections. Expanses of bushland which are untouched and protected are an asset to the Cessnock LGA. The area offers a high quality lifestyle to its residents and can be seen as a place where the best of both worlds meet: people can enjoy a country way of life without traffic jams and the hustle and bustle that comes with city living while still having direct access and proximity to facilities and services that make their lives easier and better.

Legislative and Policy Framework of the Social and Cultural Plan

The requirement for Councils to develop a Social and Community Plan has been recognised through the Local Government Act. Under the Local Government (General) Regulation 2005, all Councils in NSW are required to develop a Social and Community Plan. In 2009 the Department of Local Government introduced into Parliament a Bill to amend the Local Government Act to require an integrated approach to strategic planning by Local Councils. This Bill was adopted by NSW Parliament on 9 October 2009.

In developing the methodology for the Social and Community Plan, it was evident that there was a strong relationship between social planning and cultural planning. For instance, engaging in culture is a social need whereby people are able to enjoy, participate and feel pride in what their community has to offer. Additionally, promoting and engaging in culture allows for diversity to be celebrated and encourages the participation and sharing of skills and knowledge in for example, music, the arts and history. As a result, the development and enhancement of culture within the community achieves not only cultural outcomes but also social outcomes. Hence given the link between cultural and social planning, it presents considerable opportunity to integrate these two

areas into one planning document and enables a consistent strategic direction in improving the social and cultural needs of the community.

Given these linkages, combined with the move towards a more integrated approach to planning, 'Places, Spaces and Faces' is both a Social and Community Plan and a Cultural Plan and hence will be referred to throughout this document as the Social and Cultural Plan.

Goals of the Cessnock LGA Social and Cultural Plan

The Cessnock LGA Social and Cultural Plan has a number of goals. The plan aims to develop further:

- Opportunities for the community to participate in a range of activities.
- A community where people are provided with adequate social and cultural services.
- An attractive, creative, culturally inspiring community which is appealing to both residents and visitors to the area.
- A co-operative community where government and non government groups collectively work in partnership to prioritise and address community issues.

Consultation Methods and Findings

In preparing the Cessnock LGA Social and Cultural Plan, varying methods of consultation processes were used. The formal consultation process extended over seven months, beginning January 2009 and ceasing at the conclusion of July 2009.

In determining the strategies of the Social and Cultural Plan, five consultation methods were predominantly used. They included:

- Community Service Provider Consultation Workshop.
- Focus Consultations with Identified Population Groups.
- Community Meetings held in Locations across the Cessnock LGA.
- Culture and Arts Consultation Workshops.
- A written Community Survey.

In total, 733 people were directly consulted in the preparation of the Social and Cultural Plan using the above methodology. Chapter Four of the Social and Cultural Plan outlines the full breadth of the consultation findings. The findings outline both the expressed gaps along with identified

community assets. The consultation process undertaken within the community has been fundamental in devising the strategies of the Social and Cultural Plan.

Strategies of the Social and Cultural Plan

The strategies documented in the Social and Cultural Plan have been devised in accordance with principles of equity, social justice and sustainability. The Social and Cultural Plan outlines twenty one strategies.

The strategies documented in the Social and Cultural Plan aim to provide both Council and agencies external to Council with a five year strategic plan to develop cultural and social services within the Cessnock LGA. Council is mindful that the implementation of the plan is not the sole responsibility of one organisation and its success is dependant on external organisations working towards the identified strategies. Therefore each strategy is categorised into two sections, 'What is Council Going to Do' and 'How Can Others Address this Issue'. The involvement of community based organisations, government departments, business and community groups in addressing the actions titled 'How Can Others Address this Issue' is encouraged.

In summary, the twenty strategies documented in the Social and Cultural Plan are as follows,

1. Promoting Community Capacity Building and Community Development.
 - Communities on the Move
 - Healthy Communities
 - Promoting Safe Communities
 - Promotion of Formal Education
 - Accessible and Equitable Communities

2. Strengthening Community Culture; Promoting Social Connections.
 - Participation in Family and Community Life
 - Ageing Communities
 - Being A Part - Embracing Diversity
 - Our Youth, Our Future
 - Encouraging the Retention of Existing and the Development of New Services
 - Participate - Community Based Events and Festivals

3. Articulate – Creating Community.
 - A La Carte – Increasing Community Involvement in the Arts and Culture
 - Starting Point – Community Based Information Centres for Cessnock and Wollombi

- Vincent Street – Heart of the Arts in Cessnock
- Impart – Sharing Skills and Knowledge Between Generations
- Part Exchange – Developing Partnerships
- Outsmart – Building Business Skills For Groups
- State of the Art – Cultural Facilities for Our Communities
- Street Smart – Public Art
- Bartender – Serving Culture

The strategies above contain a number of actions aimed at advancing each strategy. It will be the responsibility of the Community and Cultural Programs Team to monitor the plan and ensure that the plan is effective in addressing the needs of the community.

The Plan also includes a chapter that outlines how best to engage with the townships of the Cessnock LGA. The chapter is titled, 'Engaging with Diverse Townships; Raising Awareness within the Community'. The principles of asset mapping and identifying community strengths are the focus of this chapter.

Priority Recommendation

In ensuring that the Social and Cultural Plan is delivered to its maximum potential, it will be necessary for Council to employ a Cultural Development Officer at the earliest opportunity. During the consultation process the need for Council to project a leadership role through the establishment of a staffing position with a focus on community arts and cultural development was raised several times. Arts and cultural groups see the need for such a role to assist them with project and program development, skills development, events organisation and general engagement with the wider community. Given Council's expansion in the provision of cultural services, there is a need for Council itself to have a member of staff with the function of engaging with the community to encourage better use of Council facilities.

The establishment of a cultural development position will enable the community cultural development function to be transferred from the direct responsibility of the management role for community and cultural programs. Such a move would provide Council with a stronger focus on cultural development, enabling it to capitalise on the recent cultural developments within the LGA and emulate the cultural staffing arrangements of other councils within the region and across NSW.

