

9.1 SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK - NOOSA RIVER CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT PLAN

Author	Principal Environment Officer - River Strategy & Engagement, Amy Kimber Strategy and Environment Department
Index	ECM/63.07 Noosa River Plan/22631243
Attachments	1. Attachment 1 - Possible changes to Noosa River Catchment Management Plan (003) 2. Attachment 2 - Noosa River Plan (as presented at GM/OM September 23) 3. Attachment 3 - Peer Review Noosa River Catchment Management Plan July 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A report on the Noosa River Catchment Management Plan was presented to the General Committee on the 18 September 2023 and referred to the Ordinary Meeting dated 21 September 2023. At the Ordinary Meeting, Councillors deferred this matter to the October round of meetings to receive further feedback on the Plan. Additional information has been received and is detailed in this report and an attachment to this report alongside the original report.

Link to previous report: [General Committee Meeting Report 18 September - Item 6.1](#)

At the 21 September 2023 Ordinary meeting, Council passed a resolution that item 6.1 Noosa River Catchment Management Plan be deferred to the next round of meetings to allow Councillors and other stakeholders an opportunity to consider the details and implications of the draft Noosa River Catchment Plan and provide feedback.

The plan had been sent to key stakeholders ahead of the General Committee meeting and was sent again to an expanded group of 24 key stakeholders, including State Government agencies, Natural Resource Management and environmental organisations, community and industry associations, the Kabi Kabi Peoples Aboriginal Corporation, research institutes, and former members of the Noosa River Stakeholder Advisory Committee (NRSAC).

Of the Stakeholders who responded either verbally or via submission, majority of stakeholders indicated general support for the Plan, a few not indicating one way or another however provided general feedback and a couple indicated objection to the plan. Feedback from former members of the Noosa River Stakeholder Advisory Committee was mixed, of those who objected it was mainly due to strong opposition by some members towards Action 1.1 of the Plan, "*Consider the establishment of a Conservation Park across Fish Habitat Areas to protect and improve the health, biodiversity, and species habitats of the Noosa River Catchment.*"

In addition to stakeholder feedback, the deferral motion led to the Plan effectively being opened to input from the broader community. Unfortunately, the result was contrary to how Council would normally approach public consultation and had the negative consequence of widespread confusion and distrust within the community.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council note the report by the Principal Environment Officer - River Strategy & Engagement to the General Committee Meeting dated 18 September 2023 and the further report on summary of submissions to the Ordinary Council Meeting 26 October 2023 regarding the updated Noosa River

Catchment Management Plan and;

- A. Adopt the Noosa River Catchment Management Plan for ongoing implementation, noting some implementation actions will involve further stakeholder engagement and are subject to future budget considerations; and
- B. Authorise the CEO to make minor changes and edits to the plan prior to finalising, designing and publishing the plan.
- C. Note the possible changes in response to feedback outlined in this report as per attachment 1 and consider if Council wishes to support these; and if supported authorise the CEO to make these changes prior to finalising and publishing the plan.

REPORT

During the past three weeks Council has received a range of comments, submissions, and enquiries from the public and the media. An opinion editorial published 23 September 2023 and a community meeting hosted by commercial operators on 4 October 2023 led to staff and Councillors receiving 160 emails and submissions from the public, 60 of whom were in support of finalisation of the Plan and a conservation park, and 96 who were opposed to a conservation park. Five emails contained additional queries and concerns. An attendance list of around 125 people who attended the community meeting hosted by commercial operators was also provided to Council as an indication of objection to the conservation park concept.

Staff also received multiple phone calls and emails from 21 key stakeholders.

A petition was established to “Stop Noosa River turning into a Conservation Park”, which received 2,400 signatures. This petition included inaccuracies in its justification, including, “Council’s assertion that there been community consultation including the move to have the river and lakes declared a conservation park.”

The petition also inaccurately states that a conservation park would directly affect Noosa North Shore residents for infrastructure issues and all members of the community for general access and use of the river, and implied endorsement of the Plan meant immediate endorsement of a conservation park.

While the draft Plan includes an action to consider the establishment of a conservation park, there is no guarantee this will occur, and it is one of several potential governance models Council has been investigating to facilitate integrated catchment management with the multiple state government agencies that have regulatory powers in and around the river.

Establishment of a conservation park would require Council to consult with the Department of Environment and Science (DES). If DES supported the concept, Council would then need to:

- Undertake a detailed feasibility study, including an assessment of current natural, cultural, and socio-economic values of the river.
- Engage with First Nations people and undertake public consultation to assess and evaluate the positive and negative impacts of a conservation park.
- Prepare a report recommending the Minister assess the proposal, should Council wish to pursue gazettal based on the outcomes of public consultation.

It is worth noting Community use, including boating, commercial and recreational fishing, is allowed in a conservation park, as it is currently in Fish Habitat Area.

There were also inaccurate reports in the community suggesting Council had plans to remove fossil fuel vessels from the river.

There is no proposal to remove fossil fuel vessels from the river, however Council has been working with Maritime Safety Queensland (MSQ) who have put forward a proposal to introduce a 28-day anchoring limit in any financial year to reduce congestion and improve the river's amenity, which is anticipated to be considered by the Minister for Transport and Main Roads in the second half of 2024. This was a major achievement and outcome of the former Noosa River Stakeholder Advisory Committee.

Council received MSQ's submission on 4 October 2023, which includes recommendations to upgrade boating infrastructure. Council intends to work with MSQ on the actions in the draft Plan highlighting the proposed initiatives.

Council notes that MSQ intends to introduce a management plan for the Noosa River that maximises the safety and equity of access for all waterway users and is consistent with a system-wide approach to waterways management. The draft Noosa River Catchment Management Plan is intended to support MSQ's plan, once developed, rather than duplicate it.

An overview of all feedback received both written and verbal following the deferral was provided to Councillors at a fourth workshop on the Plan held 12 October 2023, and is outlined below.

Summary of stakeholder feedback
<p><i>Boating Industry Association:</i></p> <p>Expressed support for finalisation of the plan, with removal of Action 1.1 relating to considering a conservation park. The BIA welcomes the opportunity to work with Council on Action 1.1 after the Plan is endorsed.</p> <p>Additionally, the BIA supports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sustainable approach to the waterway that is based upon a true balance of social, economic, environmental, and cultural benefits. • Improved boating infrastructure and access to support people of all ages and abilities. • Compliance and enforcement of existing rules and conventions without adding more red tape. • Recognition that boating has true social value and includes proven mental and physical health benefits. • Recognition that around 1 in 5 households have a boat or some form of watercraft. • Education before regulation. • Consultation.
<p><i>Cootharaba Community Association:</i></p> <p>Largely supportive of the Plan, however the timeframe to consult was incommensurate with the Plan's importance.</p>
<p><i>Cooroy Area Residents Association:</i></p> <p>Expressed support for finalisation of the Plan and establishment of a conservation park. Noted this as a starting point for implementation of future programs to improve the health of the river. Appreciate this much needed and long anticipated Plan seeks to provide direction and future consultation on ways to manage various activities within the river.</p> <p>Disappointed with the deferral. Seeking endorsement of the plan.</p>

Department of Agriculture and Fisheries:

Fish passage works require pre-lodgement advice through the State Assessment and Referral Agency (SARA).

DAF recommends separate, detailed consultation with DAF and DES to clarify the objectives of the proposed establishment of a Conservation Park Zone (CPZ) within/over the FHA. Clarity is required over a number of issues.

Restoration projects along estuary edges may involve legislative requirements under the Fisheries Act and via SARA.

Boat ramps should be designed to minimise impacts to fisheries resources.

DAF is interested in receiving oyster reef monitoring results and updates.

DES:

Catchments have been suffering because planning for them has not been a focus for the state or local governments, meaning issues are falling through the cracks.

The current draft Plan aligns well with the Resilient Rivers Initiative because its vision is an integrated management approach. A whole-of-system, values-based approach may be possible as the plan matures. Alignment of the Plan with the department's whole-of-system, values-based framework is not possible within the timeframe.

Written feedback on Frequently Asked Questions regarding a conservation park prepared for Councillors and Customer Service staff was provided.

Should Council wish to pursue a Conservation Park, formal consideration would be required and need to be requested through official Department channels.

Former NRSAC members:

Some members were highly opposed to establishment of a conservation park, while others felt it should be the purpose of the Plan. 8 members formally responded 4 in support of the plan and the conservation park consideration and 4 in opposition to the conservation park concept.

Healthy Land & Water:

Expressed support for finalisation of the Plan and indicated which actions in the Plan would be suitable for collaboration (Actions 1.3, 1.4, 1.10, 2.17, 2.21, 3.19 and 3.24).

Further workshops are planned in the coming weeks with Healthy Land & Water to identify project sites and proposals as part of its Living Waterways Program and Urban Water Stewardship Framework, in preparation for Round 2 of the [Urban Rivers and Catchments Program](#), due to be released before the end of 2023.

Funding will include:

- \$51 million to fund small to medium-sized project grants of between \$150,000 and \$2 million for community-led projects; and
- \$58 million to fund large projects of between \$2 million and \$10 million for projects that include co-investment.

Kabi Kabi:

Expressed support for finalisation of the Plan and provided extensive feedback on the Plan at a workshop held 14 August 2023.

MSQ:

Provided comments and recommendations on actions where MSQ is listed as a primary collaborator; including

1. MSQ and Council to work together to progress the Gympie Terrace Noosaville Pontoon project.
2. MSQ is funding and installing two vessel detection camera systems in the Noosa River.
3. MSQ and Council to work together to progress the boating infrastructure projects, including prioritising the proposals and assigning timelines for forward planning.
4. NSC to propose an alternative site to the proposed Chaplin Park facility.

Regarding Appendix 1 – Noosa River's Existing Management Arrangements, registration and monitoring of commercial and fishing ships is the responsibility of the Australian Maritime Safety Authority.

Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee:

Expressed support for finalisation of the Plan and advised that in 2019 the Burnett Mary Regional Group commissioned Alluvium, the same organisation that peer reviewed the draft Noosa River Catchment Management Plan, to develop the Mary River Recovery Investment Strategy, which led to \$10 million of investment over 5 years through the Great Barrier Reef Foundation, and \$5 million more recently through the Commonwealth/State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.

Noosa Biosphere Reserve Foundation:

1. Improving the management of Noosa River has been on the agenda of successive Councils for many years and the current Council are to be commended for having reached this advanced stage of a new Management Plan.
2. NBRF understands the process of establishing sound management over the Noosa River system is complex and that the Plan now proposed will require more negotiation and further development before it can be brought into operation under suitable institutional arrangements.
3. NBRF would welcome the opportunity to be more closely engaged than has been the case to date, further leveraging the partnership between the Council and the NBRF in the development and operationalisation of the Management Plan and a long-term Action Program.
4. In the final Plan NBRF could see benefits in evaluating the Biosphere Reserve model and the principles underpinning the Man and Biosphere Program in framing the governance and management arrangements for the Noosa River catchment; and in facilitating implementation.
5. Regarding the draft Plan, NBRF recognise the significance of Council's commitment to establish the river as a Conservation Area or Park, which would support the concept of the maintaining of a careful harmonious balance between people and nature which remains core to the NBRF's purpose.

NBRF would be pleased to work systematically with Council on these points, perhaps in the next phase of finalising or implementing the new Plan.

Noosa Boating and Fishing Alliance:

Strongly objects to process and timeframe and maintains NBFA was not consulted.

The Plan fails to comply with DES Catchment Action Plan factsheet requirements.

The Plan is biased towards the environmental values and biased against powered watercraft in preference to non-powered watercraft.

The Plan pays little attention to the Noosa Everglades system.

Vessel restrictions should not be incorporated into the Plan.

Does not support a conservation park and suggests that Council does not have qualified officers or resources to manage it, and it will negatively affect recreational and commercial users.

Seeks review of the Plan to remove any restrictions on vessels and the conservation park concept followed by full consultation on a revised plan.

Noosa & District Landcare:

Expressed support for finalisation of the plan. N&DL and Council are already partnering on several actions within the Plan including 2.2, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 2.14, 2.19, and 2.21.

Noosa Integrated Catchment Association:

NICA as a deeply invested stakeholder within the Noosa River catchment, extends a warm invitation for ongoing collaboration in shaping the fundamental framework of the Plan and actively contributing to its subsequent implementation. NICA can offer valuable support, participation, and action. Further resources may assist with formal commitment.

Noosa Parks Association:

Strongly supportive of the Plan currently before Council. The Association submits that it is now appropriate for Council to further strengthen the Plan by:

1. Moving beyond the proposition that consideration be given to the creation of a Noosa River Conservation Park with Noosa Council as Trustee, to
2. Noosa Council now formally requesting DES to declare a Noosa River Conservation Park with Noosa Council as Trustee, as outlined in the Plan.

Noosa Residents and Ratepayers Association:

Supportive of finalisation of the Plan and establishment of a conservation park.

Summary of public feedback

Individuals opposing the Plan: 95 emails received

From 4 October, Council officers began receiving many emails from members of the public stating they, "strongly oppose the consideration of a conservation park for the Noosa River and as a rate payer/resident have not been personally consulted or informed of the proposal."

Other concerns raised related to the perceived impact a conservation park would have on family businesses that rely on the river and tourism, and people's ability to fish and use their boats on the river.

Some felt Council had attempted to finalise the Plan without undergoing adequate consultation and expressed disappointment, distrust, and anger.

"I find this very disrespectful to all long time locals and all river users."

Individuals supporting the Plan and a conservation park: 60 emails received

From 24 September, Council officers began receiving emails from members of the public in support of finalisation of the Plan and establishment of a conservation park over the river.

Many members of the public expressed support for the conservation park concept as they felt the river had been poorly managed to date and a conservation park would protect the river for the community and future generations.

Others expressed frustration about the lack of coordination between government departments and delays to implementing the Plan.

“Without formality, Council can’t adequately address the now overwhelming evidence of environmental harm to Noosa River, (for example) caused by unregulated boat mooring, houseboat sewage pollution and bank erosion.”

Link to Corporate Plan

As per previous report.

Previous Council Consideration

As per previous report, General Committee Meeting 18 September 2023 and Ordinary Council Meeting 21 September 2023.

Finance

As per previous report.

Risk & Opportunities

As per previous report.

Consultation

External Consultation - Community & Stakeholder

As per previous report.

Internal Consultation

Departments consulted:

Office of the CEO, Mayor & Councillors		Community Services		Corporate Services	
	Mayor & Councillors		Director		Director
X	Chief Executive Officer		Community Development		Financial Services
	Executive Officers		Sport & Active Lifestyles		Fleet
X	Community Engagement		Arts & Culture		Revenue Services
	People & Culture		Community Connection		ICT
	Governance		Customer Experience		Commercial Property
Strategy & Environment & Sustainable Development		Development & Regulation		Infrastructure Services	
X	Director		Director		Director
	Strategic Land Use Planning		Development Assessment		Infrastructure Planning, Design and Delivery
	Economic Development & Destination Management		Local Laws		Civil and Asset operations
X	Environmental Services		Environmental Health		Asset Management
	Innovation & Digital Hub		Building & Plumbing		Building & Facilities
			Property / Permits		Disaster Management
				X	Waste