



Coffs Harbour Greens
Coffs Harbour
NSW 2456

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Draft Chapter 8 - Employment Lands Submission

SUMBMISSION CONTENTS:

- **Coffs Harbour City Centre**
- **Lack of liveability**
- **Nature in employment outcomes**
- **Agricultural opportunity**

Sustainability is achieved through practices that enable a lifestyle providing enough for everyone, forever.

- *Sustainable Agriculture & Gardening Eurobodalla*

To Coffs Harbour City Council,

Thank you for the chance to comment regarding Chapter 8 of the Local Growth Management Strategy – Employment Lands.

Coffs Harbour Greens congratulate council on compiling this report. Providing employment lands as our population grows, is a major current and future challenge facing land use planning. We can see from the documentation that our population is forecast to grow to over 97, 000 people by 2040 and over 12, 000 jobs are expected to be created.

Council have the strategic position to maintain the current standards of living for residents while minimising future disturbances caused by an increased population from new permanent residents and visitors.



This submission sets out our position on two central themes from the Employment Lands chapter while also considering broad statements that reflect our values and desires.

The two themes that we feel most strongly about are:

1. Impacts associated with unsustainable Core Directions
2. Greater opportunities for economic utilisation

As council moves towards making “decisive actions” regarding the “delivery of employment lands for a sustainable future”, Coffs Harbour Greens acknowledge the seven core directions offer planned economic expansion over the coming 2 decades.

However, we have concerns that council’s plans to maximise and prioritise employment lands may not pay sufficient regard to further exacerbations in land-use conflict, land degradation or to anticipating emerging social and ecological trends.

Coffs Harbour City Centre

We support council’s direction for reinforcing the City Centre as “the geographical and economic heart of the LGA”. We believe this is an excellent decision and it is hoped will strengthen our city’s identity and economic resilience going forward.

We recognise that council have already established a SWOT analysis that details many issues we see as important such as:

- exorbitant rents
- long term vacancies
- degrading building infrastructure and
- Pacific Hwy upgrade changes.

However, we have some questions, regarding the scope of the planning changes and believe more can be done to deliver positive growth and development in the City’s heart.

The following points have been made in consultation with Greens members and we believe reflect the views of a significant portion of the Coffs Harbour community who value ecological sustainability and social justice.

Lack of liveability

The CBD is concentrated with B3 – Commercial Core zoning that provides clear guidelines for commercial business. While we see in the plan specific centre

directions towards providing accommodation for elderly (CC 5.3) and university students (CC 5.2), we would like to see this accommodation direction extended to include a stronger residential mix.

Additional B4 zoning such as that has been proposed for the Jetty (TJ5) would encourage more mixed used development with retail on the ground level and residential above. Our members want to see residential zoning in the CBD to drive residential development alongside commercial interests. An example of this can be found in Sawtell along First Ave where units exist above cafés and retail shops, entrenching and enhancing the village atmosphere. This approach brings significant vibrancy to the area and represents a model of the contemporary lifestyles communities are now looking for.

Corporate commentator Bernard Salt has identified mixed zoning for the CBD previously when he visited Coffs Harbour. We agree with Mr Salt that Coffs Harbour needs to plan today before demand increases but we disagree with his sentiments for new suburbs. As council mentions in the chapter 8 draft, commercial and residential growth at Moonee Beach has impacted City visitation due to its exurb effect. With this in mind, zoning for residential development in the CBD reduces our urban development footprint. We hope this would positively reduce housing development on prime agricultural lands or lands better suited for environmental zoning.

We would also welcome council to work with state government agencies to develop public housing choices in the CBD as part of a goal to develop a comprehensive mixed zone.

We believe this “decisive” action in the CBD would see our city centre become a living heart while reducing urban sprawl. It would drive a creative culture, enhance mobility and inspire liveability – all bringing greater economic stimulus to the CBD.

With the Pacific Hwy expected to bypass Coffs Harbour in the near future, the existing Hwy infrastructure should be maximised for pedestrian and cycle ways. With an increase in residential accommodation in the CBD, the choice to walk or ride should be made easy. This European planning view would make our CBD more attractive and a vibrant place to live - This approach represent the future of planning cities.

Nature in employment outcomes

The CBD, like the other 9 Priority Precincts, need to be developed with natural features central to their identity. Council cannot quote the North Coast 2016 Regional Plan’s vision for the North Coast to be:

The best region in Australia to live, work and play thanks to its spectacular environment and vibrant communities.



...and not strive to establish a CBD and other precincts where native vegetation is not enhanced through connectivity of existing green zones and the establishment of new green spaces. If the CBD is to be attractive to new arrivals and tourists, then nature should be a focus, and valued.

Coffs Harbour Greens understand Council recognise the value in protecting and enhancing our beautiful natural environment consequently making the Coffs Coast a truly wonderful place to live and work. But the effort to prioritise natural values seems to be consistently unimagined and rhetorical. Unfortunately many other regional cities and towns are seeing a decline in natural spaces as roads widen or industrial and residential development are encouraged. If managed well, this does not need to be the case for the Coffs Coast.

Sadly, the Employment Lands chapter, seems to fail to convincingly position the living world any higher than a marketing vision for enticing wealthy retirees or investors from major cities. With a stronger focus/alignment with the natural world, the strategy could represent an opportunity to have a positive impact and ensure progressive outcomes for the community.

Coffs Harbour Greens want to see a greater priority shown to natural processes. Council should see these processes as ecosystem services that:

- mitigate pollution,
- improve the visual amenity
- reduce stress
- increase biodiversity
- reduce climate change impacts and
- protect clean air, water and marine environments.

The chapter sees ecosystem services solely from a human-centred view and places nature in service of us. The chapter seems to institute economic development before environmental sustainability. We therefore argue that nature does have, at a minimum, a utilitarian role to play in the long-term betterment of economic and social development. Council's language, at the very least, should reflect this role for nature.

A vision of "land" that falls solely within classical economic attitudes is short-sighted and fails to fully grasp the inherent risks of climate change and biodiversity losses let alone the widespread benefits of green 'native' zoning. To disregard our natural assets when considering employment lands is thinking from last century – it is not what drives strong sustainable communities.

We welcome Council implementing green zones, as part of this chapter, at the betterment of our economy and society at large. The impacts associated with industrial lands in particular are unpleasant and detract from an area's greater potential. For example, the Woolgoolga Precinct is made up of an industrial estate zoned IN1 General Industrial and is the first Impression made when people visit the village area. There is no seeming strategic



ecological restoration plan to counteract the degraded visual amenity or loss of habitat as a result of land clearing.

This visually makes the entrance to Woolgoolga more like an industrial wasteland than showing we live in “spectacular environments and vibrant communities.” Ecological values need to be prioritised in this Employment Lands chapter so developers and investors are clear we have high benchmark standards when it comes to meeting the vision stated above.

Agricultural Opportunity

With our sub-tropical climate well suited to a range of everyday staples, it makes economic and employment sense to diversify agricultural land use. We support the establishment of specific directions for primary producers who are NOT part of the intensive horticulture industry to be supported in self-employment.

The intensive plant horticulture industry has provided an “anchor” industry for Coffs Harbour and in particular the Woolgoolga area. However, the industry comes at a cost environmentally and its economic stability is intertwined with trade security and itinerant worker availability. Dependency on a single sector comes with risk.

We believe Coffs Harbour would benefit from diversifying our primary productivity to include employment lands that create produce for artisan markets that have lower environmental impacts and more sustainable economic returns.

This is not true for the blueberry industry. It has repeatedly been shown by Southern Cross University researchers that the industry pollutes our coastal waterways. Mitigation efforts to manage pollution are being trialled but the ecological risks associated with the industry continue.

Too much reliance on the blueberry industry would appear to be in conflict with the North Coast Regional Plan’s vision for a thriving environment where people can live, work and play. The challenge for council is not to accept the blueberry industry as an employment kingmaker but embrace the overarching values and vision the community want in the MyCoffs Strategic Plan: *Connected, Sustainable and Thriving Employment Lands*.

We believe council need to create planning and economic incentives that support small-scale fresh food growers. There are already several market gardeners such as New Life Farm at Sapphire; Synchronicity Farm at Nana Glen; and First Choice Organics Limited at Sandy Beach who provide to a range of markets. Demand for local high quality produce is high but supply is low especially with personal reports from local distributors Bello Food Box and Synchronicity Farms that demand has rapidly grown during the coronavirus pandemic.

We would like to see council reinforce and support these small to medium enterprises so direct and indirect employment in this sustainable sector can be developed. The economic



value in prioritising this land use has ongoing positive benefits for our community both socially and environmentally especially in terms of carbon farming and diversifying incomes.

As a strategic plan for employment lands, Coffs Harbour needs a greater focus on prioritising sustainable agriculture and garden producers. Council, however, could ask further questions about agriculture's role in helping Australia recover from Covid-19. How do we create clean, secure jobs and agricultural investment in our area? How can agriculture take advantage of a post-pandemic world? How are we setting up long term adaptability and sustainability for a new global era reshaped by pandemics, climate change and other big risks and shocks?

The Coffs Harbour Greens have a desire to see sustainable, healthy (preferably organic) and diverse food staples produced locally and at scale. We believe there is enormous demand from domestic households to local businesses who cater for travellers, workers or local eaters and for markets inter-state. Our "world's best" climate and soils, especially around Bonville, make this focus obvious.

We believe that for small-scale agriculture specialists to succeed, Council must proactively support their industry. The benefits are clear but the government support is often lacking. So, we would like to see research and development goals associated with the Local Growth Management Strategy that reinforce this emerging agriculture sector. Communities across Australia are behind this sector and in particular the SAGE Farmers Markets on the South Coast of NSW:

The public demand for locally grown and locally made is enormous and shows no sign of diminishing. Meanwhile, the organisation behind the market – Sustainable Agriculture & Gardening Eurobodalla – is working hard to revive the local agricultural and horticultural heritage of our region. Through training, mentoring and support, SAGE is helping families and individuals with a passion for growing get established in the area as farmers. The demand for sustainably grown, local, fresh, healthy, delicious produce is growing faster than can currently be supplied. The future of local food in the Eurobodalla is full of opportunities and promise.¹

Council can support this emerging sector with economic and planning resources that lead to a genuinely sustainable agricultural sector that benefits all Coffs Harbour families.

Collaboration with other council's, government agencies and the nongovernment sector will aid the economic and sustainable development underpinning local market gardening. Synchronicity Farm, for example, have developed the Agribusiness Incubation Program that links new willing farmers to land and mentors.²

¹ <https://sagefarmersmarket.org.au/about/>

² <https://synchronicityfarm.com/agribusiness/motivation/>

COFFS HARBOUR GREENS

Ecological Sustainability | Social equity & economic justice
Grassroots democracy | Peace, disarmament & nonviolence



We believe this essential employment growth area is largely unrecognised by council in the Chapter 8 of the LGMS. While mention of artisan food producers exists, its relevance is dwarfed in importance for the status quo in agribusiness and industrialised farming that seems to ignore vulnerabilities in regards to future shocks such as climate change, global economic instability, pandemics and social attitudes changing towards sustainable and local food production.

Developing small-scale agriculture and market gardens would provide a sustainable farming “anchor” across the Coffs Harbour community whereby small-scale diverse and resilient agricultural services would coincide with education hubs such as schools and TAFE that already provide courses and training specifically targeted to this sustainable farming industry.

Our hope, in chapter 8 of the LGMS, is that council will prioritise employment lands that make our region renowned for its market garden produce over the next 20 years and beyond.

Conclusion

We recognise the time has come to revisit how employment lands are considered in the expected growth and development of the Coffs Harbour LGA. There are many smart and decisive considerations as part of this Chapter 8 as we have mentioned above.

However, there are seemingly short-sighted planning directions that ignore important economic and social drivers of sustainability. In saying this, we believe that Core Direction No. 2 is not in our best interests if an industry is *detrimental* to other industries, environmental sustainability or to future society post-2040 such as the Blueberry Industry currently stands.

Council have an opportunity to create planning instruments for sustainable agriculture and market garden producers whereby economic sustainability is long-term. As a major regional centre inter-connected with surrounding LGA's and their local small-scale primary producers, we can create a vision as a community over the coming decades together with outstanding sustainability values. If we do, by 2040, Coffs Harbour's employment lands *will* support a thriving and sustainable local economy!

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment.

Kind regards,

Jonathan Cassell

Coffs Harbour Greens Convener