



Recognising and upholding excellence in local government

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Dear Flora and the Community Strategy Refresh team

**RE: Community strategy consultation**

Firstly thank you for the opportunity to submit some late comments. When I spoke with you I had hoped that OSCAR would be able to run a community conversation re the Strategy.

Unfortunately the hoped for plan didn't eventuate. We have a very engaged executive team but owing to illness within the executive and 2 executive members out of the state on holidays for 5-6 weeks reduced our capacity to run the conversation. I understand that a number of OSCAR members attended.

**Overall comments**

In the first instance we say that there are some excellent components in the Strategy and Action Plan and SCRC is to be congratulated. OSCAR makes the following comments in the interest of continuous improvement.

We also congratulate the team and SCRC on the *Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners* at the beginning of the Strategy document and the ongoing work with our First Nations People.

However, from our discussions there are some common elements relating to both the Community Strategy and the ELS.

**Some General comments**

1. What is the priority of the whole strategy?
2. Where does it sit in the overall strategy of the Council and how much notice is taken of it, that is what weight does it carry?
3. Need for clear objectives and where and how the community Strategy relates to policy.
4. How are strategic components incorporated into Statutory Documents such as the Planning Scheme with subsequent meaningful assessment. Many of the Outcome areas relate directly to the Planning Scheme. For example, on page 34 of the Strategy in the section "what our community said. States that:  
*Our community told us they value:*
  - *community infrastructure, including: parks, pathways, open space, and sport and recreation infrastructure*
  - *working together to care for our built and natural environment and make sure we can all continue to enjoy our relaxed outdoor lifestyle and clean, green spaces*
  - *a well-designed community, with good urban planning.*

What changes need to be made to the PS to strengthen these and other components from the Strategy?

5. There needs to be a greater commitment to evaluation, including setting targets, monitoring, measuring and reporting, with for example details of “*Source: Sunshine Coast Council Community Connections Survey 2021*”, re how and when the survey is conducted and on what basis community members were asked to respond. Is it a targeted or random survey? Some auditing of the process would also be helpful.

### Specific areas of comment

1. Climate Change, despite being included in the ELS is also a significant factor within the social, cultural and economic life of our community. Climate Change is an existential threat to humanity. We would like to see reference to that in the document, particularly related to how the various areas of the Council work together on this theme.
2. How we deal with death and following processes is an important and challenging time of life for families and communities, particularly given the ageing of our community. The Community Strategy can play a very important role in this space. One of our members has been working within the community to consider how we as a community deal with death and what follows and how council can support families in preparing for that time not only through the provision of cemeteries but the processes associated with that decision. OSCAR feels that the Community Strategy should have carriage of this area, given that “*Our community told us they want us to: support an inclusive, caring community that looks after each other and values diversity*” (p25). The Community should provide input into the cemeteries plan and that could be done via the Community strategy.
3. We suggest that there should be a greater focus in *Outcome 3: Inclusive Communities* on valuing and celebrating multiculturalism - high international and interstate migration rates (especially from the major diaspora countries such as China, India, Pakistan and major refugee areas such as African countries) means the Coast will have an increasing range of diverse language and cultural groups to accommodate and welcome into and enrich our communities.
4. Outcome 3 Inclusive Communities, Element 3 (page 37 of the Strategy) and Priority Areas 3.3 and 3.4 of the Action Plan (page 10 and 11) and the 4 associated Actions on page 11 reference housing needs, community housing, housing affordability, universal housing design and reference to Planning Scheme provisions.

OSCAR suggests that:

- (a) As part of planning for new greenfield development and urban consolidation with increased density housing aim to improve community perspectives and acceptance - by “taking the community on a journey” and conducting an engagement program and undertaking a few projects collaboratively with Council, community representatives and developers, demonstrating high quality attractive, liveable, inclusive urban design. Use these projects to benchmark design standards to be followed in future including via the new Planning Scheme.
- (b) As a major community development aim, ensure that new development (greenfield and urban consolidation) is serviced with the full range of physical, social, community, environmental and economic infrastructure as development occurs not decades after it. e.g. ensure public and active transport, walkways, libraries,

community centres, child care centres, schools, health services, sports fields and open space, green open space etc are all planned and delivered in a timely way to help deliver well-serviced, connected, integrated, liveable communities.

5. Outcome 3 Inclusive communities, Element 6 references *Traditional owners and First Nations Peoples are values and respected (P37)*. OSCAR acknowledges the work Council has been undertaking in this area, however we would like to see better recognition, knowledge and respect for First Nations history, culture and heritage - a local and regional educational, truth telling and reconciliation process through schools and community groups and Council sponsored or supported community initiatives.
6. OSCAR recommends: More frequent and effective advocacy by Council to influence the policies, legislation and programs of the State and Federal Governments where these are inconsistent with the needs and aspirations of the Coast community e.g. action on many aspects of Climate Change, housing policy, biodiversity protection, community engagement in decisions on development applications.
7. Community group exhaustion and “burn out” We would like to see a “Community Check” incorporated into the First Outcome: Healthy Communities Priority Area 1.3, where one of the actions refers to community organisation sustainability. Many of our groups from the Pumicestone Passage and Caloundra to Yandina and Coolumb; Mooloolaba and Buddina to Mapleton and groups in between are all occupied with issues within their realm involving topics of transparency, inconsistency in community engagement processes for contentious issues, compliance with the Planning Scheme, including supporting and/or challenging SCRC in the Planning and Environment Court. Given the role and activities of the State Government in relation to housing and the “targeted” review of the SEQRP the community is also active in looking at how to support SCRC in advocating for the Inter Urban Break (IUB).

While all of this is going on SCRC has added major consultation processes related to the ELS and the Community Strategy. I sense our community groups are tired, overworked and at times do not feel supported and in some cases not valued by SCRC.

8. Language used throughout the two documents  
Perhaps the exemplar for contemporary non-patronising language is in the Actions document *Outcome 5: Creative, Innovative Communities* (pages 14-15)
  - (a) Inconsistent language used in some places throughout the document. It is pleasing to see the use of the terms partner and collaborate used in the actions document. However the use of the term “volunteers” in Outcome 1 (Pages 32 and 33), Elements of “*what a healthy active community looks like*” in some circumstances is patronising.
  - (b) It is also good to see that some parts of the strategy have taken note of the misuse of the words “empower and build capacity” while other components have not, such as in the “Purpose of the Strategy (p10) says “*the framework says what council will (and can) do as a local government, and how we will go about doing it. Specifically, the purpose of the Community Strategy is to:*
    - **empower** our community to live healthy and active lifestyles (Bullet point 1)
    - **build capacity** in our communities to be connected, resilient and to respond to local issues (bullet point 4)

- (c) Page 25 *Our community also told us they value: collaboration* (bullet point 3), where the document then states *“empowering communities”*. Maybe that could read *collaboration - empowered communities and council working together*.
- (d) Page 16 *“The role of council in building a strong community”* demonstrates understanding of the true definition of empowerment where it states line 3 an *“active and **empowered** community”* and on line 8 *“that offer people opportunities to connect, **build their capacity**.....*  
However, on page 17 *“What does council already do?”* The following sentence appears (para4) ***Build the capacity of the community to respond to local challenges.***
- (e) Also on page 41 Element 7, Column 2 *What Council does* states *“we work to build the capacity of the community in many ways”*. Council does NOT build capacity, but it does play an enabling and supporting role.
- (f) In the **Action Plan**, Outcome 4, Connected, Resilient Communities priority Area 4.4, (p13) the second action states *“build the capacity of local community organisations to deliver.....”**we suggest that wording could be “Work with Community organisations.....”*
- (g) Action Plan Outcome 4, Priority 4.1 (page13 Action 2 states *“build social capital and capacity within our community”*. This action needs to be reworded.

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The Sunshine Coast community in many areas has empowered itself and in terms of capacity has people with knowledge and skill equal to and in some areas better than council. In the 1980s and 90s those two terms were already becoming redundant as evidenced by the Landcare and Regional Natural Resource Management groups. By the 2020s those and similar patronising and community deficit words are no longer acceptable or necessary.

However, it should be noted that there are times when it seems that Council inadvertently “disempowers” the community through lack of transparency, poor or lack of effective community engagement.

#### Some editorial comments:

- On page 26 bullet point 3, line 2 I suggest should be the verb, practise not the noun practice.
  - On page 37, Element 4 refers to an “appropriate” range of affordable living options. The word appropriate is superfluous here. Often the word appropriate is used in a manner that makes it a “weasel” word.
9. On page 37 How we’ll track our project, makes the statement (second last line and last line): *Selected indicators from the Scanlon – Monash Social Cohesion Index and housing stress will also be considered.* Did that occur?
  10. In the section “What Council does” (page 17) should include role statements that relate to the timing of council community engagement activities. The Community Engagement program for 2023 is unsustainable and SCRC should look very closely at the 2023 program and evaluate the timing, the number of engagements and the impact on community groups trying to be responsive. Is the “unholy” rush because the Council will be in caretaker mode by February 2024?

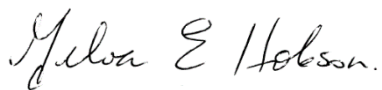
**Conclusion**

The Community Strategy and the ELS ultimately need adequate resourcing if they are to have action plans that robustly give effect to the Strategies.

OSCAR would like to see a preliminary community engagement process, in relation to the Council Budget parameters the community see as imperative to delivering the action plans of both Strategies. Noosa Council did something along these lines in a recent budget process,

Thank you for the opportunity to have input into the community strategy. We wish you the best in refreshing the strategy, a very important document.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melva E Hobson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Melva Hobson PSM

**President**

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