

## PROPOSAL: Sustainable Futures Reference Group

**To:** *MidCoast Council*  
**By:** *Manning Clean Water Action Group Inc*  
**Date:** *28 August 2020*

Manning Clean Water Action Group Inc (MCWAG) is encouraging the establishment of a Sustainable Futures Reference Group by MidCoast Council. Our initial contribution here goes to the strategic/policy component (rather than operational or governance aspects) of the terms of reference.

### **Suggested Purpose**

The purpose of the Sustainable Futures Reference Group is to

- Promote and facilitate the leadership role of MidCoast Council in promoting community initiatives to ensure a sustainable future in the face of a changing climate.
- Garner social licence and community support for climate action initiatives.
- Strengthen MidCoast Council's commitment to participation in relevant non- government organisations (NGO), and relevant state and federal government programs, such as its participation in the Cities Power Partnership and NSW Department of Industry, Planning and Environment (DPIE) *Renewable Energy Blueprint for Local Governments*.

### **Suggested Scope**

The Reference Group is **to advise** on a range of matters including

- education and information resources to be distributed to the community about renewable energy
- developing renewable energy strategies such as community energy microgrids and sustainable arrangements for edge-of and off-grid systems for residents
- the suitability of utility-scale renewable energy projects
- the suitability of bulk-buying renewable energy and infrastructure for economical community uptake
- sustainable and accessible transport options
- low energy demand housing
- sustainable agricultural and grazing practices.

### **Suggested Composition**

MCWAG appreciates MidCoast Council General Manager's explanation, at our 5 March 2020 meeting with the Mayor, that, if and when such a group is established, a "call out" by media release and website announcement would be issued to interested parties for inclusion on the reference group with a "holistic community approach" being taken so that every interested party is given an opportunity to be a stakeholder.

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MCWAG Committee has researched many committees and reference groups of various councils and finds clause 8.2 in North Sydney Council's Environment Reference Group most amenable to the approach outlined by MidCoast Council's General Manager. The clause says:

*“There is no limit to the number of Citizen Members. Citizen Member eligibility includes:*

- a) individuals – North Sydney residents; and*
- b) representatives from community organisations/groups working with the community in North Sydney, with a maximum of two representatives from any one group.”*

We also suggest that the composition of the reference group should include environment-related and farming-related business, industry or service groupings for a host of good reasons including that the [community-owned solar gardens](#) concept may be easily facilitated by business or industry rooftops.

### NOTES

1. In making this proposal MCWAG does not presume to be representative of the whole of the sustainability focused community in the MidCoast Council area but, rather, aims to serve as a community catalyst for a sustainable futures type of reference group. MCWAG has had some initial, informal conversations with groups such as Energise Gloucester, Gloucester Sustainable Futures and Groundswell Gloucester. This has informed our opinion that there is a strong appetite in the community for constructive engagement with Council to advance sustainability interests.
2. Our approach to Council about a sustainable futures type of forum began with our meeting with the Mayor on 5 March 2020 (see sections 4.1 & 4.2 of MCWAG report about that meeting sent to MidCoast Council in early June 2020). At that meeting, reference was made to the final version of the Northern NSW Renewable Energy Blueprint for Local Governments issued on 23 July 2019 by the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE). Here is the link to it at the Office of Local Government website <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/councils/northern-nsw-renewable-energy-blueprint>). (It is noticeable that half of the Blueprint is about "developing renewable energy opportunities in council operations" and the other half is dedicated to **local council's role regarding "renewable energy within the community"**.)

We then encouraged Council at the last page of our 5 August 2020 letter to the General Manager as follows:

*“We have already commended MCC on joining over 120 Councils in the [Cities Power Partnership](#) program. We would welcome the opportunity to join other community groups in providing input to MCC's work with the Partnership to reduce emissions through renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable transport and community advocacy.”*

3. For illustration, Annexure 1 contains (page 1 & 2 excerpt from) Environmental Reference Group Charter of North Sydney Council, (page 1 & 2 excerpt from) Sustainable Futures Committee Terms

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of Reference of Shoalhaven City Council and the Sustainability Working Group Charter of Port Macquarie Hastings Council.

4. We have been encouraged by Council's resolution 187/19 about the development of a draft Climate Change policy and particularly Point 7 of that resolution: *"The identification of activities, programs and projects that Council could undertake in partnership with the residents, businesses and farmers of MidCoast Council to reduce climate impacts"*.
5. We note that [the first requirement for Councils commencing membership of the Cities Power Partnership is to identify, within 6 months, "5 items included in the Cities Power Partnership Pledge that your council will strive to achieve. \(Noting that some projects already in the council pipeline could be included towards a council's pledge\)"](#).

The Pledges are listed in Appendix A of the booklet "CITIES POWER PARTNERSHIP: Information for Councils".

There is no listing on Council's website of the five pledges, which Council was to submit within 6 months, nor have we found information on how projects already in the Council pipeline align with any of the pledge options.

We are pleased to find [information on Council's website](#) showing that Council is being proactive in mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions from its own energy use. However, there appears to be a gap in support and capacity development for the community, noting that at least a quarter of the Cities Power Partnership pledges are focussed on working together with the community and influencing community.

6. MidCoast 2030 Strategic Community Plan variously identifies community groups, not for profit organisations and environmental groups in relation to a raft of measures to further the aims in the Plan. These include to
  - "support communities identify priorities for ensuring they are sustainable into the future"
  - "ensure climate change risks and impacts are understood and managed"
  - "protect, maintain and restore water quality within our estuaries, wetlands and waterways"
  - "value, protect, monitor, and manage the health and diversity of our natural assets, wildlife and ecosystems"
  - "improve the capacity of industry and the community to achieve the best possible outcomes for the natural environment"
  - "ensure growth and new development complements our existing natural assets, cultural assets and heritage sites".

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