



# MIDCOAST SKATEPARK STRATEGY

2023-2035



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### **Acknowledgement of Country**

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and live, the Gathang-speaking people and pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now reside in the MidCoast Council area. We extend our respect to Elders past and present, and to all future cultural-knowledge holders.

# Glossary of Terms

**Skate:** an active recreational activity or sport involving riding on a skateboard. Skate can take place in both structured facilities and the urban environment.

**Skatepark:** a structured form that provides a range of graduated elements for skate, scooter and other applications.

**Ramp Park:** another term for skatepark but used for when BMX riding is taking place on the structure.

**Skateboard:** a specific sport equipment used for riding.

**Scooter:** a specific sport equipment used for riding.

**Bowl:** a specific skate element within a skatepark. Often considered to be an advanced element for experienced riders.

**Length of Stay (LOS):** planning concept based on the length of time a participant will stay at a facility. Often based on the level of facility and the range of elements provided.

**Catchment:** planning concept that considers the number of participants that will travel to a specific facility.

**Skate Elements:** the different structures provided within the skatepark itself. Elements include bowls, pipes, half-pipes, ramp, fun-boxes, handrails, gaps, launchers, quarter, wall, table, stairs and many others. Each element requires a different skill set and provides the rider with a different challenge.

**Built Space:** Any form constructed by humans, such as roads, buildings, paths. Used by skaters.

**Skate Portfolio:** A collection of skate facilities which has been planned and delivered to provide community outcomes based on the synergistic interaction across the group.

**BMX Park (Freestyle):** The use of a BMX bike within a skatepark, focusing on movements specific to BMX. BMX Park is different to the main BMX activity of BMX racing, which is undertaken on a BMX track.

**Pump Track:** Facility designed for BMX bikes where the participant does not peddle, but rather uses upper body movement to propel the bike around the undulating course.

# Executive Summary

The *MidCoast Skatepark Strategy 2023 – 2035* is a critical supporting document to the *MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2035 (OSRS)*. The OSRS sets out the vision, guiding principles and aspirations for our public open space, how we use it and how we care for it. This Skatepark Strategy is an asset specific planning document focused on one of the components of our public open space, skateparks.

One of the eight guiding principles we have adopted in the OSRS is *use knowledge and evidence-based management*.

Therefore, the Skatepark Strategy has been developed on a foundation of evidence, and every recommendation contained within the Action Plan is then based on that evidence. This approach will ensure that in the future every skatepark that we have will be where it needs to be and provide value based on evidence.

The Strategy highlights that skateparks are far more than community assets, rather, that they are youth attractors, where youth meet to hang out. The Strategy explores this concept, and both the audit and the action plan and its recommendations are strongly orientated towards creating youth spaces.

The audit that was conducted as part of the development of the Strategy has shown that our skate portfolio is large compared to many other councils, with 15 skateparks for a population of 96,800. The skate portfolio is widely distributed but in most cases is old. In short, it is not delivering the value that the community told us they want from their community infrastructure in our parks. The audit investigated each skate asset and considered how each community accesses skate facilities, whether they are currently in the right locations, and what size and type they should be. The skate audit tells us that there is much work to do to deliver what our community has asked for.

The most important part of this Strategy is the Action Plan. It contains 17 individual recommendations, and each one of these is based on an evidenced based approach to planning. The Skatepark Action Plan includes the removal of five existing skate facilities where they are not delivering the value that we wish from them. We are also planning the construction of two new facilities, along with the upgrade of the remainder.

The Strategy speaks extensively of our skate assets as a portfolio, and details how each individual skate asset is part of a holistic package that offers our community a diverse range of experiences. This portfolio approach is based on the skate hierarchy set out in the strategy. As opposed to the sport and play hierarchies, which are detailed in the OSRS, which are based on facility embellishment in the case of sport, and childhood development in the case of play, the skate hierarchy is primarily based on the skill set of the participant. To achieve the optimum skate portfolio, we need to remove some of them, where they are not providing value to their communities. However, where we remove old and unused facilities the Strategy recommends new or upgraded facilities in accessible locations.

Lastly, this Strategy has a life cycle of twelve years. Each of the recommendations in the Action Plan has been allocated a Short, Medium- or Long-term priority. Therefore, some communities will get new or upgraded skateparks in the near term, these have been judged to be the most important, however, where the need is less acute the recommendations have been given medium- or long-term priorities. By the time we review this Strategy we will not have delivered all the recommendations, however, we will be working systematically through the recommendations seeking to give our youth, and all those that skate high quality skate experiences where they are most needed.



# INTRODUCTION

# Introduction

## *Our skateparks help our community live healthy and active lives.*

During 2022 and the first half of 2023 we developed the *MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2035*. This is the foundational strategy that guides us on how we manage the extensive public open spaces that we have. The Strategy also provides overarching guidance on the numerous uses of our public open space, including recreation activities, such as sport, play and skate.

Through the development of the *MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023-2035* we engaged with the community to confirm our analysis of our current open space and we identified six key insights. From these, a vision, guiding principles and actions list have been developed. The vision reflects the value that our community places on our open space. The eight guiding principles have been developed to guide us in our management and delivery of open space in the MidCoast region. The actions reflect our understanding of the short-, medium- and long-term needs and aspirations of our community.

<b>INSIGHTS</b>	<b>OUR VISION</b>	<b>PRINCIPLES</b>
Maintenance needs to be improved	<p><b>“ We love our open space.</b></p> <p><b>It’s where Indigenous culture and history is celebrated, biodiversity is protected, social connections happen, and locals and visitors feel welcome.</b></p> <p><b>We will preserve and cherish it for future generations. ”</b></p>	Maintain and strengthen
Make open space more accessible, connected and flexible		Prepare for the future
Cycling and walking are important		Connect with community
Partnerships are important		Evidence-based management
Need to protect for future generations		Protect nature and culture
		Build partnerships
		Promote safety
		Use rational decision making

<b>ACTIONS</b>	Pathways and trails	Sports lighting	Usage strategies	Access	Multipurpose courts
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This skatepark strategy is a direct recommendation from the *MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2035*. The vision, guiding principles and intent of the open space and recreation strategy form the basis of the skatepark strategy.

## OUR SKATEPARK VISION

“ Our youth have access to skate facilities that help to enhance their lives. They provide a diverse range of skate elements that challenge skaters. Our skateparks are contemporary, innovative, imaginative, inclusive, socially engaging, appropriately located, equitably distributed, sustainably managed and they contribute to our active lifestyles. ”

## OUR GOAL

“ Our goal is to have innovative and challenging skate facilities that our young people are proud of. ”

## Background

Home to 96,800 people (2021), the MidCoast region offers our diverse community a wide range of lifestyle opportunities. Located on the mid north coast of NSW, the geographical area covers more than 10,000 km<sup>2</sup> and extends from the coastline, west to the escarpment of the Great Dividing Range. The Biripi and Worimi people are the traditional owners of the land. The region is well known for its natural beauty and is a key holiday destination that attracts a large number of tourists and visitors throughout the seasons. The area spans from sparkling beaches on the coast to mountains in the hinterland, with expansive national parks and green spaces in between. It includes the Manning River valley, the Wallis, Smiths and Myall Lakes systems, the northern foreshore of Port Stephens, the agricultural hinterland and rugged, forested ranges of the Woko and Tapin Tops National Parks, and the World Heritage-listed Barrington Tops National Park. These natural features contribute to our lifestyles, livelihoods and wellbeing, and protecting and celebrating them is an important focus for our future.

We manage 4134ha of public open space, made up of 826 parks and reserves. There are 15 individual skate facilities spread throughout the region. These play an important role in the overall provision of recreation services to the community and whilst Council acknowledges the importance of skate facilities to our community, it is keen to ensure our skateparks are managed in the most effective manner for social, economic and environmental outcomes for the community.

To this end, Council has embarked on this strategy to assist it in determining the ‘state of skate’ in MidCoast and to ensure it keeps abreast of changing demands, needs and at the same time manages these important assets for current and future generations.



## Methodology

In developing this strategy, the following actions were undertaken:

- 1 Defining and understanding the importance of skate and trends in skate planning
- 2 Auditing all skateparks in the region, including location and condition
- 3 Determining current and future classifications
- 4 Making recommendations for future design, management and provision of skateparks.
- 5 Consulting with the community with regards to their thoughts on the Strategy and youth-based activities in MidCoast

***The Skatepark Strategy makes recommendations on future skateparks.***

## Why do we need a Strategy?

Skaters are going to Skate. Whether we provide a facility for them or not. If we don't provide safe, equitable and easy to access skate facilities then those members of the community who skate will use the built space to do it. Our roads, footpaths and building entries are unsafe for skate, both for the participants and the community.

This MidCoast Skatepark Strategy is a direct recommendation from the *MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2035*. The People in Parks section of the OSRS highlighted the importance of skate to our community and the need to bring our skate portfolio up to acceptable contemporary standards.

None of the amalgamated councils that made up the MidCoast Council had skate planning strategies in place. Therefore, this Strategy provides new strategic direction for the development, and sustainable management of skate facilities across the whole region, as well as a comprehensive Action Plan for the future development of the skate portfolio.

We have 15 public skateparks in our parks and reserves

Skateparks are significant investments made by Council on behalf of the community. These assets need to be maintained over a 30-year lifecycle and this Strategy provides direction for the management and maintenance of our skate portfolio.

Changes to legislation, Australian Standards for skate provision, community expectations, new trends, the increasing urbanisation of the MidCoast region and the uneven increase in population will require the review of this Strategy every ten (10) years.

A critical source document for this Strategy is the Skatepark Best Practice Guide by The Skatepark project<sup>1</sup>.

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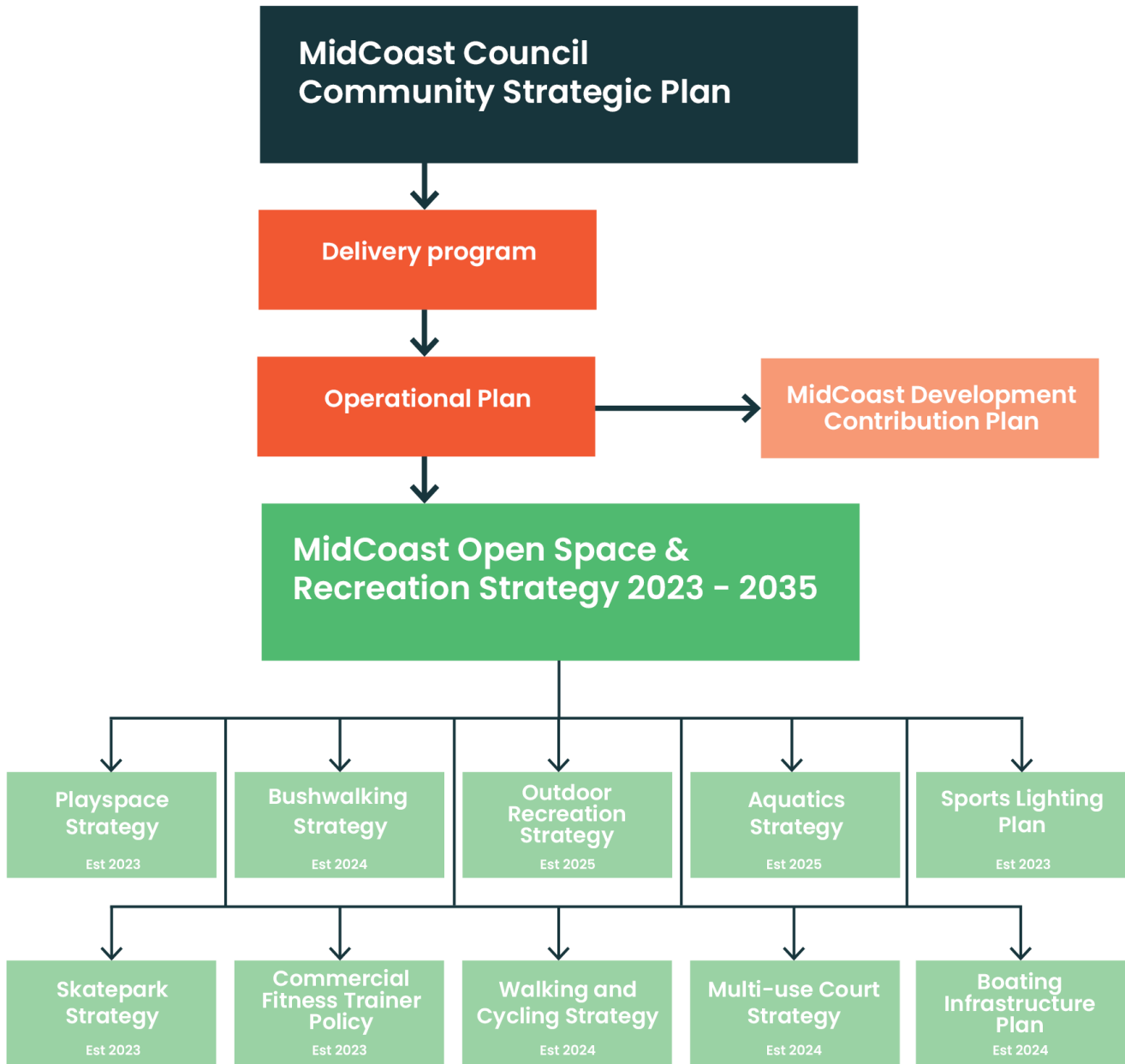
<sup>1</sup> <https://skatepark.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Best-Practices-Guide-3.0-11-2022-Optimized-Reduced.pdf>



# STRATEGIC PLANNING

# Strategic Planning

This Skatepark Strategy is one component of our larger open space planning framework. The framework was identified in the *MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2035* (OSRS). The OSRS is the source document for all public open space planning documents. Below is the planning framework, as highlighted in the OSRS.



## Key Principles

The following key principles will direct the provision of skate facilities in the MidCoast region

1. **Equitable distribution** - Provision of a portfolio of contemporary skate facilities that ensures that the individual skateparks are located where they can meet the needs of the community.
2. **Diversity** – A skatepark portfolio that offers a range of skate experiences, based on a graduated hierarchy of skate facilities.
3. **Co-location** – Where appropriate co-locate skate facilities with other facilities such as sporting facilities and village greens to maximise capacity and efficiency of use.
4. **Excellence in Design** – Innovative and contemporary designs that are attractive to skaters and which consider the context and embrace a ‘total park planning’ approach so that skateparks are inclusive, accessible, intergenerational, creative, and minimise maintenance to deliver fit for purpose facilities.
5. **Maintainability** – Skateparks that are robust and consider lifecycle management of the asset.
6. **Sustainability**: Skateparks that are located, designed, constructed and maintained sustainably.

## Strategy Objectives

This Strategy has the following objectives

1. Adopt a holistic portfolio approach to planning for, constructing and managing our skateparks
2. Develop a skate portfolio that reflects the community’s wishes and is seen as excellent
3. Aligns with the aspiration and outcomes from the Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 - 2035
4. Provides the future planning framework for the delivery of skate facilities within the region
5. Provides an evidence-based planning approach that explains why skate is important and justifies each action within the Action Plan
6. Establish the Key Principles for the provision of quality skate facilities for the MidCoast region
7. Outline the process for the sustainable management and maintenance of skateparks
8. Provide a skate portfolio that is innovative and engaging

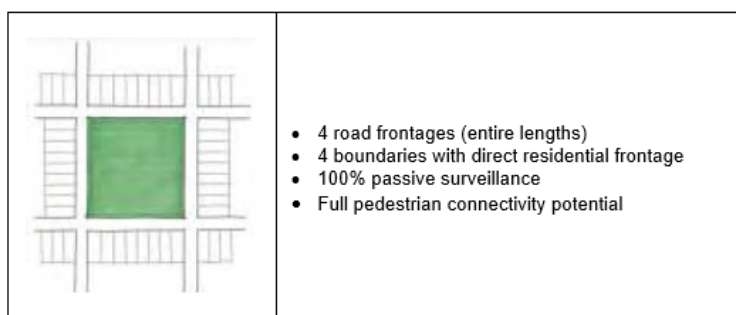
## Visibility, Accessibility, Connectivity (VAC)

There are several planning considerations involved in the sustainable management of our public open spaces, and the provision of infrastructure, such as our skate facilities. They fall under three categories: Visibility, Accessibility and Connectivity (VAC)<sup>2</sup>. A skate facility needs to be in a location that has both active and passive surveillance. This is often obtained in a high profile “village green” location or where there is significant passing traffic and is observable from a distance. This does not apply to a number of skate parks in MidCoast. Passive visibility helps to alleviate anti-social behaviour, but also provides the level of observation that participants seek in this activity.

Second, the facility needs to be accessible, not just for all-ability access but also for the cohort that frequents these facilities i.e., young teens who don’t drive. Access to public transport and active transport is critical for the success of skateparks. Lastly, the facility should be connected to other places that youth wish to be at. This could be a shopping precinct, a beach, or other park facilities.

Unless these planning considerations form the basis of locating a facility not only will the facility not be used by youth, but experience has shown that the general community will not support any new facility that doesn’t align with these planning considerations.

The image below is an illustration of how a well-planned park, and the facility within it, can form the central “heart” of a community. This open space is safe for all, accessible to all and encourages our community to value and visit their parks. Most of our parks are more dynamic than this simple example, with linear parks, coastal parks and parks neighbouring bushland being the norm. However, the concepts of VAC still apply to these parks.



Skate planning has come a long way, and it is now considered highly desirable to provide Regional level skateparks as the main facility, with Local and District supporting the Regional facility. The same definition and inclusions that apply to the play hierarchy (see the People who Play section in the OSRS) apply to skateparks. Regional level skateparks are extensive, provide many different ride elements and include amenities such as seating, shade, toilets and youth hang-out spaces. Youth will travel for a high quality skatepark. It is the elements that are provided that drive visitation. The more dynamic and challenging the park, while also encouraging learner riders, the more visitation.

MidCoast has 15 skateparks spread throughout the MidCoast local government area. As with sports fields and other recreation infrastructure these skateparks have been provided in several small towns, purely on historic demand. Most are of very basic design and provide very limited skate value. The majority of these smaller facilities would be classified as less than Local.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.parksleisure.com.au/research-portal/resources>

## Distribution

Like playspaces skateparks are also provided based on portfolio distribution. Planning for skate aims to provide a selection of skate experiences within a catchment radius of the majority of youth. The Skate Hierarchy is the main mechanism for providing a distributed portfolio. But unlike play there is less focus on the Local facility, as these offer beginner skill elements, with both District and Regional offering a more extensive skate experience. It could be the case that a teenager could progress through a whole skill development process on either a District or Regional facility without even having skated at a Local facility.

***Our goal is to provide a well distributed skate portfolio within traveling distance of most of our youth.***



**PLANNING  
FOR SKATE**

## Planning for Skate

Since the 1980's, when the provision of skate facilities first took hold, the three councils that made up MidCoast Council have provided a range of skate facilities. It could be fair to describe this provision as ad hoc, with limited planning being involved, and where community demand was the driving force. Because of this, most older skate facilities in MidCoast are not fit for purpose, being in the wrong locations and not providing high value skate opportunities. Most of these legacy skate facilities are too old, too small and provide very little skate value.

Skateparks are one of the most bespoke and dynamic facilities within the recreation portfolio. Firstly, they do not have a resident club who supervises, maintains and upgrades the facility, they remain our responsibility. Second, they cater for all age groups, making them unique in active recreation, as the facility is not age dependant, as playspaces are, but are rather skill dependent. And third, their play value experience is completely dependent on the original design, with a poorly designed skatepark excluding a large cohort of the participant population.

Take for example the existing skatepark at Gloucester. This was built in the 1980's, when skatepark design was in its infancy, and when councils were only just starting to provide them for the community. This design excludes almost all riders, except for experienced riders, as the bowl element is the most advanced element in skate. In the Olympics the bowl is the only element provided, to test the skills of the riders. Beginners of all ages will not ride at this park due to it only providing the bowl, with a very small basic element in the bottom of the bowl.

A more contemporary design can be found in the recently completed Stroud skatepark. This facility provides riding elements for riders with different skill and experience levels. It still has the downwards bowl drop, but also includes several other riding experiences. This facility, and larger versions of it are examples of what we will seek to provide in the future.

***We will seek to provide skateparks for a diverse range of skills.***

### What is Skate?

For the purposes of this strategy skate is defined as including the following activities:

- Skateboards
- Scooters
- Inline skates
- Roller skates
- Longboards
- BMX
- Inclusive versions of the above



## What is a skatepark?

A skatepark is a specially designed & purpose-built space designated and equipped for “action sports” such as Skateboarding, BMX riding, Wheelchair Motocross, Roller (Quad) Skating, Inline Skating and Scootering

When good planning is practiced	
Skateparks ARE:	Skateparks are NOT:
Public	Restricted
Concrete	Prefabricated
Permanent	Temporary
Unique to location	Replicated
Quiet	Loud
Centralised	Isolated
Accessible	Remote
Inclusive	Exclusionary
Attractive	Unattractive
Self-governing	Lawless
Safe Space	Dangerous
An asset	A liability

For the purposes of this strategy a skatepark can include the following facilities:

- Skateparks
- Ramp parks
- Pump facilities

## Why Skate

Current research shows a move away from structured sport to more informal physical activities. Skateparks provide an alternative for people not engaged in organised sport to participate in physical activity and create opportunities for informal youth gatherings in public spaces.

The humble skatepark, where only skateboard riders could ride are now expanding to other forms of activity, including BMX bikes and scooters. Skateparks are evolving, and demand for dynamic ramp infrastructure has also increased.

Skateparks provide opportunity for intergenerational co-operation, tolerance, social interaction and co-existence. This assists with counteracting age stereotypes, developing emotional and social skills and supporting social integration. Intergenerational activation of skateparks is a growing trend that makes these facilities more accessible to the broader community. This, along with the emergence of skateboarding at an Olympic level will offer economic benefits from skate-based tourism and further increase demand for this type of facility within the LGA.

## Skate as an elite sport

Skateboarding made its debut appearance at the 2021 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, Japan. It has also been provisionally approved by the IOC for inclusion at the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris. To be included at the highest level of elite sport means skate has developed a tiered competition structure, much like other Olympic sports, including regional, national and international competitions. In short, skate has become mainstream.

The journey from fringe activity to the Olympics was not an easy one. The skateboarding sub-culture did not support the inclusion of skate at the Olympics. They stated that the Olympic Games were too "mainstream" for the sport. Similar fringe activities such as mountain biking have experienced the same journey, with the traditionalists and diehards not supporting the recognition of the activity as a "sport", noting that the whole philosophy of the activity is anti-establishment and existing outside the rules.

Another challenge for skate is the number of injuries (including death) sustained from skateboarding, with the view that the activity is too risky. Local government is the main provider of skate facilities, as we are the main land managers in the country. For many years skate remained as a fringe activity, where participants used the built space to undertake their activity, because local government refused to provide skateparks due to the risk involved. Over the last couple of decades this perception has been broken down and many skateparks are now provided.

***Our goal is to provide a graduated skate portfolio that allows local youth to progress to the elite level.***

## A Skate Portfolio

The recognition of skate as an international sport at the Olympics has a direct impact on land managers and those tasked with providing skate facilities. Youth in our region will be striving to compete at the highest level, and therefore will anticipate having access to higher level facilities within their local area.

With a need to provide a more comprehensive skate experience for our youth this strategy considers our skate facilities from a portfolio perspective, much like we are now considering our play facilities as part of a larger portfolio. What this means on the ground is an awareness that different levels of facilities need to be provided, along with different elements and challenges. This does not mean MORE skateparks, but rather skateparks offering a full range of challenges. Therefore, the hierarchy in this Strategy is the main mechanism for the development of a skate portfolio.

## Trends in Skate

Skate first originated in the 1950's, as a counter point activity for surfers, who couldn't find a wave. The activity developed over the following decades. Until the 1980's skate was undertaken in the built space, including roads, streets, shopping centres and any other built form. A number of social issues meant that land managers, primarily local government, saw skate as an issue that needed to be solved, rather than an activity delivering community outcomes, much like we see sport. Skaters were looking for a safer place to ride, but also somewhere where they could practice their skills, without being moved on. In the 1980's the first skateparks started to appear in Australia and the activity started to be adopted by "mainstream" youth.

The provision of skateparks gave credibility to the activity. At first skatepark construction focused on the high-end participant, who had the skills. This is why many earlier skateparks take the form of simple bowls, the most basic but also the most challenging of skate elements. Since 2000 the

skatepark has become more dynamic, with street elements being included. As more kids started to skate different “zones” were added, to try and separate different skill levels.

Ausplay data, produced by the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) indicates that more than 250,000 adult Australians reported that they took part in skate activities in 2021. Of these 146,000 were male and 104,000 were female. In addition, a further 180,000 children (1-14 years old), or 10% of their cohort reported that they were participating in skate activities. At 10% of an age cohort this puts skate in the top five physical activities done in this group. Even though skate participation does not compare with the large number of Australians participating in other physical activities it is still significant. It is anticipated that the number of Australians partaking in skate is going to continue to increase, especially with skate being included in the Olympics which will have a direct impact on participation in the sport.

Most recently the term “skate” and the use of skateparks has expanded and morphed again. The popularity of scooters, first produced for younger children to ride on the footpath, has now seen scooter join skate as a popular activity for youth. Skateparks are perfect for scooter riders and our local skateparks are now used by both skaters and scooters.

Another activity that has joined skate is BMX. BMX developed through a different stream, and has its own journey, including the Olympics. BMX has several different sub-disciplines, one being pump. This is where the pumping motion of the upper body is used to propel the bike over a course. BMX riders have now found that skateparks are excellent built forms for BMX riding, including pump. Riding a BMX bike on a skatepark has its own term, Park BMX, which denotes the BMX discipline of exclusively riding on skateparks. The emphasis for Park BMX is riding bowl transitions or jump boxes.

## Skate styles

In order to meet the needs of the various users, this Strategy has analysed the many styles of boarding, scootering and BMX and applied them to future planning. These styles include:

- Plaza or street skateboarding and riding
- “Park” style boarding and riding
- Transition boarding and riding
- Vert skateboarding
- BMX Park
- Pump
- Longboarding

## Pump tracks

A new form of skate facility that has become popular is pump. A pump track is a circuit of rollers, banked turns and features designed to be ridden completely by riders “pumping”—generating momentum by up and down body movements, instead of pedaling or pushing. It was originally designed for the mountain bike and BMX scene, and now, due to concrete constructions, is also used by skateboard, and accessible to wheelchairs. Pump tracks are relatively simple to use and cater to a wide variety of rider skill levels.

Original skateparks were designed for experienced skateboarders, and so many injuries occurred with riders that were new to the sport. Pump tracks became a bridging facility to introduce new riders. Pump is a blend between mountain and BMX riding with skateparks. BMX Park is where a BMX bike is ridden on a skatepark. Pump tracks allow BMX riders to use a purpose-built facility for them.

The *MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2035* recommended the investigation of providing pump facilities, and so it is our intention to provide a small number of pump tracks in the MidCoast area. See the Action Plan for more information.

## “Not in my backyard” (NIMBY)

One of the main issues with skateparks has been pushback from the community in relation to anti-social behaviour that is believed to be associated with skate facilities. Back in the 1980's, when local government first started considering the construction of skate facilities in their areas anti-social behaviour did take place at many of the facilities, mainly due to councils not understanding how the parks should be designed and more importantly where they should be located.

Unwanted repercussions from skateparks also includes noise. Skateparks create noise, from the activity and from the youth. This is often unwelcome by the community, with nearby residents being impacted. However, over the next few decades evidence has shown that if the facility is located in high visitation and high visibility parks then tagging, noise and anti-social behaviour is greatly reduced.

Recently it has been found, through the Place Making theory approach to community infrastructure, that where land managers involve locals in the design process, the community is more likely to feel a sense of ownership of the facility and will seek to protect it. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the case of skateparks. Time and again well considered community engagement throughout the design process has delivered skateparks that remain un-tagged, and behaviour around the facility is self-regulated.

A good local example of this approach is the new skatepark at Mountain Park in Bulahdelah. Local skaters report that this is their favourite local skatepark, and visitation to the park is coming from as far afield as Sydney. This facility was built in 2020, with significant community input into its design. Three years later and there is not one tag on the whole park, proof that where we involve the skate community in designing the park, they take care of their facility.

It has been found that when large Regional skateparks are well located, where the community has been involved in design, that design elements are included that young people are attracted to and want to gain skills in, that these facilities are a drawcard for youth, and a place where the community comes together.

## The importance of being seen

***Teens who do not skate hang out with friends at skateparks, enjoying each other's company.***

Skateparks are primarily a facility designed for a specific activity, skating. However, because this activity attracts mainly teens skateparks by their nature become youth centres, either by design or by accident.

Surveys conducted with skaters often find that the social interaction that is integral to skate is just as important as the design of the actual skatepark. Often girls will be attracted to skateparks because they want to skate but will spend quite some time observing how the park “works” before their first ride. Teens who do not skate also congregate in social groups at skateparks.

An important aspect of “skate culture” is being seen or being observed whilst skating. This means that skaters like to be watched when they are skating, and others like to watch them. This “watching” serves two purposes, one being the ability to pick up skills and experience by watching a more advanced skater, with resultant discussion and feedback. The other is societal, in that youth like to interact over a common interest. Many land managers who manage skateparks now understand that skateparks are often youth attractors, with youth ‘hanging out’ at skateparks, even if they don't skate. This then feeds into their design appreciations.

From a planning and design perspective it is therefore important that we don't just build skateparks for skaters, but that we think of them from a holistic perspective. When considering design, we

need to include viewing areas, or areas where people can stand above the elements, and look down onto the participant. Passive hang-out areas should be included around the park, especially if we are designing a Regional skatepark.

Good design is also a major component in ensuring that anti-social behavior, covered earlier in this strategy can be minimalised. We want to design so that both participants and observers are active in the sport.

Because of this attractor factor of skateparks the amenity that we provide is also important. Regional skateparks should not just be located in high traffic areas, but the park itself should have toilets, shade, hang-out areas and even playspaces. This allows the skatepark to become a community hub. For more information on community hubs see the *MidCoast Playspace Strategy 2023 – 2035*.

The image to the side is of the Geelong Waterfront Skatepark. This is an urban design skatepark, re-creating an urban environment within a park. The amenity and hang-out areas dominate the space. This is a highly popular skatepark and youth centre. Significant carparking has been provided, as surveys have found that most people visiting Regional level facilities get there by car.

We don't intent to replicate this facility in MidCoast, but its design has been studied by many councils around Australia, and certain design elements have been copied, and its influence on design philosophy is significant.

## Sharing the park

One of the characteristics that makes skating unique is that people with different levels of skill need to share the same small space. Unlike sport, play and all other recreation pursuits, where different skill levels, often associated with different ages are separated from others, skaters often interact with different skilled riders. Skaters with advanced skill levels get frustrated when beginners are using a facility, especially one that has advanced elements, such as bowls. The design image below shows a contemporary design, where the advanced bowl element has been separated from the primary low and intermediate element to lessen conflict.

Along with contemporary design, the skate hierarchy is an important tool in providing different facilities for different skill sets. A well-considered skate portfolio will provide a graduated set of facilities, that provides for beginners, intermediary and advanced skaters.

## Skate Park Users

### Local

As is highlighted in the hierarchy Local level facilities are designed primarily for beginners or young children introducing themselves to skate and scooters for the first time. Therefore, a Local facility should concentrate on beginner skills and provide basic elements. Intermediate or advanced skaters rarely visit or use Local facilities. That does not mean that Local facilities are less important, rather that they are vital to introducing new skaters to the sport in a safe, simple and nonjudgmental environment, where people of the same skill level can encourage each other. Often parents will accompany their children to Local skateparks.

## District

District level skateparks are for beginners and intermediaries, with some visitation by advanced skaters. Beginners use District level parks firstly for the beginner elements included in these parks. They will also use the intermediate elements to transition from beginners' skills to more advanced. Advanced skaters may use a District level facility, but mainly because they don't have access to higher level facilities or to concentrate on bowl and advanced elements within the park. If there are going to be clashes between users it is normally at District level facilities, with all the different skills coming together. This is why it is vital to provide a Regional level facility within a reasonable radius of Local and District level facilities.

## Regional

Regional level facilities offer all elements, from beginner to advanced. However, Regional level facilities should be dominated by advanced skill skaters. If beginner elements are included, they should be either in a separate part of the park, or their "run lines" should not impact more advanced elements and users. That is not to say that beginners or intermediary skaters shouldn't go there, because this is where these riders watch and learn from more advanced skaters, but the design and signage should articulate to these less skilled skaters that they should restrict themselves to the easier elements, or that they should develop skills in lower-level facilities before progressing to a more advanced facility. It is important to us that skaters who aspire to compete at the highest level have access to a high-level facility. To achieve this, we need to provide a skate portfolio that caters for all riders.

## Australian Standards

Just like playspace provision, skateparks have their own Australian Standard, AS EN 14974:2021.

The Australian Standards are guidelines for the design and installation of skateparks within Australian states and territories. They specify safety requirements and ensure a high quality of workmanship associated with the design, installation, maintenance and testing of skateparks and their surfacing. They are not intended to provide totally risk-free environments. The standard provides:

*"Safety requirements and requirements for testing and marking, information supplied by the manufacturer, information for users, as well as for inspection and maintenance to protect users and third parties (e.g., spectators) from hazards, as far as possible, when using a skatepark as intended, or as can be reasonably expected."*

Australian Standards are a minimum benchmark and are not mandatory unless referenced in legislation or regulation. The Australian Standards for Skateparks should be consulted by anyone planning, designing, building or maintaining a facility.

Changes to the Standards are not retrospective and skateparks that currently comply with previous Standards remain compliant. However, due to the age of a number of our skateparks there will be some that do not comply with the latest standards, or even previous standards, even though they are functionally sound.

## Legalised skate spots

Remember that skateparks are a representation of the urban environment. The purpose of providing skateparks is to provide a safe space for skaters to do what they would otherwise do in our streets, buildings and community spaces. Therefore, if there is a specific site in our built space that can be made legally available for skaters then this is a win-win, the skaters get the environment that they want, and we don't have to build a purpose built skatepark. These sites are very rare, because we need somewhere that attracts skaters, but where the public isn't also

attracted to. Forecourts of shopping centres and libraries are very attractive to skaters, but their presence causes clashes with the community. These are not the spaces.

Local skaters are attracted to existing space that is “skateable”. If it’s public space and it can be shared, we will seriously consider officially legalising skateboarding in spaces that are functional for action sports and where it is safe for both you and the community. These spaces already exist and would cost little to designate as recreation space. If you are a skater, and you have a spot that is attractive then come speak to us and we can consider your suggestion. It’s a very cost-effective way to create nearly instant skate space. We might say no but you won’t know unless you ask.

## Skate Hierarchy

The Skate Action Plan seeks to balance the skate portfolio. To achieve this we use the skate hierarchy. Each level of the hierarchy is important for both skill development as well as youth development.

Just like sport and play planning, there is also a hierarchy for skate facilities. Future provision will be based on this hierarchy. *The skate hierarchy is different to sport and play, in that it is driven by the skills of the participant.*

- Local
- District
- Regional

Classification	Planning Considerations	Definition
<b>Local</b>	Skateparks in this category support scooter or skater beginners within local spaces in residential neighbourhoods. These traditional smaller neighbourhood skate facilities are repetitive in design and use, which creates a focused environment to practice as beginners at these spaces before moving onto the larger skate spaces.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approx. 200-600m<sup>2</sup> providing for local communities’ training activities and participation programs.</li> <li>• LOS – 20mins – 1hr</li> <li>• Services a local community, suburb or multiple suburbs, approx. 15min travel time to access. Often accessed by walking or bike.</li> <li>• Generally single focus (street elements, ramp). Often part of broader recreation precinct which may include a Local playspace.</li> <li>• Focus on intermediate/beginner but still functional for more advanced users, however, rarely used by them.</li> </ul>

Classification	Planning Considerations	Definition
<b>District</b>	<p>Skateparks in this category cater to intermediate user styles and levels of proficiency in a central accessible area. Generally sited in recreation reserves or with other sporting infrastructure, they support beginner/entry level use or practice, as well as providing more advanced elements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approx. 600-1500m<sup>2</sup> within 30min travel time to access within the LGA or across regions.</li> <li>• LOS – 1hr – 2hrs</li> <li>• District facilities service a local population who are willing to travel for the skate experience. They provide a mix of recreational, competitive and program formats of participation.</li> <li>• Either single user focus (bowl, or street components) or mix used by beginner through to intermediate level</li> </ul>
<b>Regional</b>	<p>Skateparks in this category are large enough to allow for multiple levels of proficiency in one facility. Generally sited in recreation reserves or high visitation open space. They can support the major needs of those participants in the sport at one time, often designed in “zones” that ensure riders of different skills are not interacting.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over 1500m<sup>2</sup>, or significant location or components</li> <li>• LOS – 2hrs+</li> <li>• Attract riders from across and outside the LGA.</li> <li>• Provides for high level competition and training, and/or a broad range of opportunities for a large number</li> </ul>





# THE MIDCOAST "STATE OF SKATE"

# The MidCoast “State of Skate”

The following chapter looks at the state of skate facilities in the MidCoast region. Similar to the MidCoast play portfolio the MidCoast skate portfolio has been heavily influenced by the provision decisions made by the three old councils that made up the MidCoast Council. But just as important is the influence that the unique nature of the settlement distribution throughout the region has had on facility provision. Standalone settlements have heavily influenced what community facilities have been provided, where they have been provided, and to what level.

## Supply and Distribution

As with the playspace portfolio MidCoast has more skateparks than what is a reasonable supply for the population that we have.

This section looks at international standards for skateparks as well as a NSW benchmarking exercise. The first thing that we will look at is a standard which considers what would be an indicative level of provision for our population. Some work in this area has been undertaken by the Tony Hawke Foundation, with a link to their Skatepark Adoption Model being in the footnote below<sup>3</sup>.

## Standards

International standards or guidelines, highlighted in the Skatepark Adoption Model, indicate a provision of 1 x Regional level skatepark per 25,000 population. However, because of our unique geographic layout this may not be met, and we will provide Regional skateparks for a smaller centre than the guide. However, we should cover this number of people within a catchment. For example, a Regional level skatepark in Taree will cover the wider area.

*Skatepark Standard - 1 X Regional skatepark – 25,000*

## Benchmark

In addition to using a standard to guide provision, we can also look at what other councils in NSW have done. This is often a rough guide, and care should be taken in using benchmarking, but it does allow us to consider similar councils around the country. Councils haven't traditionally considered population in skatepark provision, however, as we have adopted an evidenced based approach benchmarking is a good guide.

LGA	Total Skateparks	Approximate Population	Skateparks to population
Blacktown	3	337,000	1 x skatepark for <b>112,000</b>
Campbelltown	3	170,000	1 x skatepark for <b>56,600</b>
Camden	2	77,000	1 x skatepark for <b>38,500</b>
Central Coast	17	339,000	1 x skatepark for <b>19,941</b>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://publicskateparkguide.org/vision/skatepark-adoption-model/>

Lake Macquarie	12	213,845	1 x skatepark for <b>17,820</b>
Liverpool	3	205,000	1 x skatepark for <b>68,333</b>
<b>MidCoast</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>96,800</b>	<b>1 x skatepark for 6,453</b>
Penrith	4	194,134	1 x skatepark for <b>48,533</b>
Port Macquarie	6	88,145	1 x skatepark for <b>14,690</b>
<b>On average 1 skatepark for every 27,674 population</b>			

## Benchmark Analysis

A few observations can be made from the benchmarking exercise.

### 1. Less but larger is better.

One of the main observations from the benchmarking exercise is that large councils are providing less skate facilities, but that those facilities are all Regional level facilities. All the Sydney based councils have adopted a policy of providing high level facilities, often located in high traffic parks, but no Local skateparks in neighbourhood parks. All of these Sydney councils have plenty of public open space, so lack of space is not the reason for this approach, but the approach appears to be about concentrating assets. These councils have adopted an approach that maximizes the visibility of the facility to overcome any anti-social issues. Larger skateparks in large parks offer high levels of passive surveillance, ensuring that anti-social behavior is reduced. These large Regional skateparks provide a “one-stop shop” experience for all skaters, be they beginners or advanced riders. These facilities have different “zones” in them that allow beginner riders to practice their skills away from more challenging elements where advanced riders are active.

### 2. Coastal councils.

Central Coast, Lake Macquarie and Port Macquarie councils provide a good comparison for MidCoast. These councils are linear in geography, with large waterways providing natural barriers to movement. They also present the same level of settlement distribution and size. You can also see a similarity in the number of skateparks provided, with a large portfolio, that includes a large percentage of Local skateparks and very few Regional. Two of them also have significantly higher populations. Their skatepark ratio is not as high as the Sydney councils but is at least double that of MidCoast’s. It could be expected that these coastal councils have constructed smaller Local skateparks in small settlements in the past and have now “accepted” them as part of their portfolio, much like the approach that we will take.

### 3. It looks like we may have too many.

It would appear from the skatepark ratio of 1 per 6,453 that we may have too many. Compared to all other councils our ratio is significantly lower. This indicates an over-supply issue. However, this may be a simplistic view of the data. If the standard is considered, then we have close to enough Local skateparks, but an under-supply of Regional level facilities.

There is a clear need to rationalise our skate portfolio, even considering the other coastal councils’ level of provision. For our population 15 skateparks, all of which are either Local or District is too many. At the same time, we need to equitably provide facilities in our population centres. Several of our old Local skateparks are obviously not providing high quality skate value to the community and are an ongoing burden for us to maintain.

## Skate Audit

To get a full understanding of the state of skate facilities in the MidCoast region an audit of skate facilities has been undertaken. In the table below we examine all the existing skate facilities.

Each of the 15 skateparks has been allocated a category in accordance with the skate hierarchy as detailed above. However, this classification is arbitrary, and is allocated as a means of identification and to understand the state of the larger existing MidCoast skate portfolio, and to ascertain the current catchment for each facility.

Several of our small rural skateparks do not meet the classification for a Local playspace. The categorisation is not a statement that each individual facility meets the recommended requirements as listed in the hierarchy.

The following table shows the current MidCoast skate portfolio and is displayed with the following metrics:

Key	Description
<b>Park #</b>	Map Reference number
<b>Site</b>	Name of park or reserve
<b>Suburb</b>	Location of the playspace
<b>Current Classification</b>	L = Local D = District R = Regional * = Indicates a facility that is less than the hierarchy description
<b>Condition Rating</b>	Subjective assessment based on physical appearance and general asset condition with a ranking of: E = Excellent condition / Almost New G = Good condition with no major signs of wear and tear F = Fair condition with some signs of ageing /wear and tear P = Poor condition with some or equipment heavily damaged or worn

Park #	Site	Suburb	Current Classification			Condition Rating			
			L	D	R	E	G	F	P
1	Mountain Park	Bulahdelah		X		X			
2	Barrington Park	Barrington	X*						X
3	Moorooba Reserve	Coomba Park	X*						X
4	Billabong Park	Gloucester		X*				X	
5	Bottlebrush Reserve	Green Point	X*					X	
6	Oxley Reserve	Harrington	X*					X	

Park #	Site	Suburb	Current Classification			Condition Rating			
			L	D	R	E	G	F	P
7	Nabiac Oval	Nabiac	X				X		
8	Old Bar Park	Old Bar		X			X		
9	Leone Fidden Park	Pindimar	X*						X
10	Smiths Lake Recreation Ground	Smiths Lake	X*				X		
11	Stroud Showground	Stroud		X		X			
12	Taree Park	Taree		X*				X	
13	Myall Reserve	Tea Gardens	X*					X	
14	Fazio Park	Tuncurry		X			X		
15	Wingham Reserve	Wingham	X					X	

## Skate Audit Analysis

A number of key issues have been identified:

### 1. Lack of high-level elements

The primary factor in skate skill development is graduated elements. When a child first starts to skate (or scooter) they start on simple elements. They then progress through more and more challenging elements, each step advancing their skills. It is therefore important that skateparks that are in their immediate area offer a graduated selection of elements. In the MidCoast skate portfolio this is not offered, but rather the same elements are presented in most of the older facilities.

### 2. No Regional level facility

There is no Regional level facility available to young skaters. As noted in point 1 it is important to offer a graduated set of elements, with different skate facilities. Advanced skaters, or even entry level skaters benefit from having access to a Regional level facility, both to advance their skills, but also to be able to watch more advanced skaters, and to learn from them.

### 3. Lack of amenity

Just like all community assets it is important to ensure that amenity is provided. In the case of playspaces, which are provided based on Length of Stay (LOS), the lack of amenity restricts the LOS, which is what we are seeking. The higher the level of facility the more amenity is provided. In the case of skate facilities, the LOS is often quite long, because skateparks are often youth gathering areas, where teenagers linger for long periods of time, sometimes skating and other times just hanging out. Good quality amenity is therefore important and tends to ensure that facilities are cared for by the skaters. Skateparks without amenity tend to be subject to vandalism and a general lack of care.

#### **4. Standalone facilities**

As noted in the skate hierarchy it is important to consider skate provision as part of a package or portfolio. Co-locating skateparks with other community facilities, such as sports fields, libraries and youth drop-in centres will lead to the skatepark being seen as a prime gathering point for youth. One of the major attractors of skateparks is the ability to hang out with your friends. Therefore, District and Regional level facilities should be co-located with other community facilities.

#### **5. General condition**

The age and condition of our smaller skateparks is very poor. This is not only an age issue, but also a lack of design. Examples of this are Pindimar, Barrington and Coomba skateparks. These are up to 40 years old. When constructed there was no design appreciation conducted for skateparks, and this is evident in their simplistic elements. The Action Plan recommends the removal of these facilities, with larger facilities being constructed or upgraded nearby, which will provide a contemporary facility for these communities.



# SKATE ACTION PLAN

# Skate Action Plan

The following section and mapping provide the future Action Plan for our skate portfolio. In developing this action plan the existing portfolio has been assessed for its condition, functionality, locations, the distribution of each existing and future catchment and its quantum of different hierarchy.

The future skate portfolio will tier down through the different levels, with four Regional level facilities in major centres, supported by District level facilities in minor centres and the remainder of the portfolio being Local level skateparks in key locations. It is anticipated that this will ensure that all members of our community have access to a quality skate experience within either a walk or a short drive, with the opportunity for all to be able to access a Regional facility when desired.

The following maps and tables show the MidCoast future skate portfolio and is displayed with the following metrics:

Key	Description
<b>Park #</b>	Map Reference number
<b>Site</b>	Park in which the facility is located
<b>Suburb</b>	Physical location of the skatepark
<b>Action</b>	Details the specific action to be carried out for the facility L = Local D = District R = Regional Replace = Provide contemporary equipment at the same level Upgrade = Increase classification Remove = Remove existing equipment and do not replace
<b>Priority</b>	Details the priority that the provision or upgrade is to take place. The priorities are broken up as follows: S – Short-term priority. 0 – 3 years M – Medium-term priority. 4 – 8 years L – Long-term priority. 9 – 12 years
<b>Rationale</b>	Brief description that justifies the action.



Park #	Site	Suburb	Action	Priority			Rationale
				S	M	L	
1	Mountain Park	Bulahdelah	D. No action required				Contemporary design, excellent condition. Provides catchment for larger area. Skaters are saying “we love this park; it has great elements”.
2	Barrington Park	Barrington	L. Remove	X			Poor condition. Poor location. No value. Limited use. Covered by 4.
3	Moorooba Reserve	Coomba Park	L. Remove	X			Poor condition. No value. Limited use. Covered by 14.
4	Billabong Park	Gloucester	D. Upgrade to Regional		X		Poorly designed facility. Demolish. Upgrade for larger catchment. Incorporated with new Regional Playspace.
5	Bottlebrush Reserve	Green Point	L. Remove at end of life		X		Limited value. Included in catchment from 14 and 16.
6	Oxley Reserve	Harrington	L. Upgrade to District	X			Upgrade for wider catchment.
7	Nabiac Oval	Nabiac	L. Replace modular with Local			X	New Local will activate the facility.
8	Old Bar Park	Old Bar	District.			X	Conduct needs analysis in masterplan
9	Leone Fidden Reserve	Pindimar	L. Remove	X			Poor condition. No value. Not being used. Covered by 17.
10	Smiths Lake Recreation Ground	Smiths Lake	L. Add new elements		X		Extend current facility. New elements needed. Good site.
11	Stroud Showground	Stroud	D. No action required				Contemporary design, excellent condition. Will compliment 4.
12	Taree Park	Taree	D. Upgrade to Regional	X			Primary facility for larger catchment. Excellent site.
13	Myall Reserve	Tea Gardens	L. Remove	X			See 17
14	Vincent Fazio Park	Tuncurry	D. Upgrade to Regional.		X		Needs design update. Includes Forster catchment.

Park #	Site	Suburb	Action	Priority			Rationale
				S	M	L	
15	Wingham Reserve	Wingham	L. Upgrade to District	X			Remove from Railway Reserve. Construct new at Railway Bridge Res.
16	Wylie Breckenridge	Black Head	D. New Provision.	X			District level providing larger catchment for Hallidays Point area
17	Providence Park	Hawks Nest	D. New Provision	X			Construct new District level skatepark as part of larger District playspace and fitness zone.
18	Gloucester Park	Gloucester	New provision Pump track		X		Construct new pump track in the park. Complements #4.
19	Edinburgh Reserve	Taree	New provision Pump track		X		Construct new pump track in the northeast corner of the park.
20	Vincent Fazio Park	Tuncurry	New provision Pump track		X		Construct new pump track in the park. Complements #14.
21	Coopernook Oval	Coopernook	New provision Pump track	X			Construct new pump track in the park. Action #21 from OSRS.

## Changes snapshot

Following is a table indicating the changes from the existing skate portfolio to the planned future portfolio.

Current		
Local	District	Regional
8	7	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>15</b>

Future		
Local	District	Regional
2	7	3
<b>Remove</b>		<b>5</b>
<b>New skate</b>		<b>2</b>
<b>New pump</b>		<b>4</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>12</b>

Below are the prioritised new and upgraded facilities.

	S	M	L
<b>Total New and Upgrades per priority</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>

## Skatepark removal breakdown

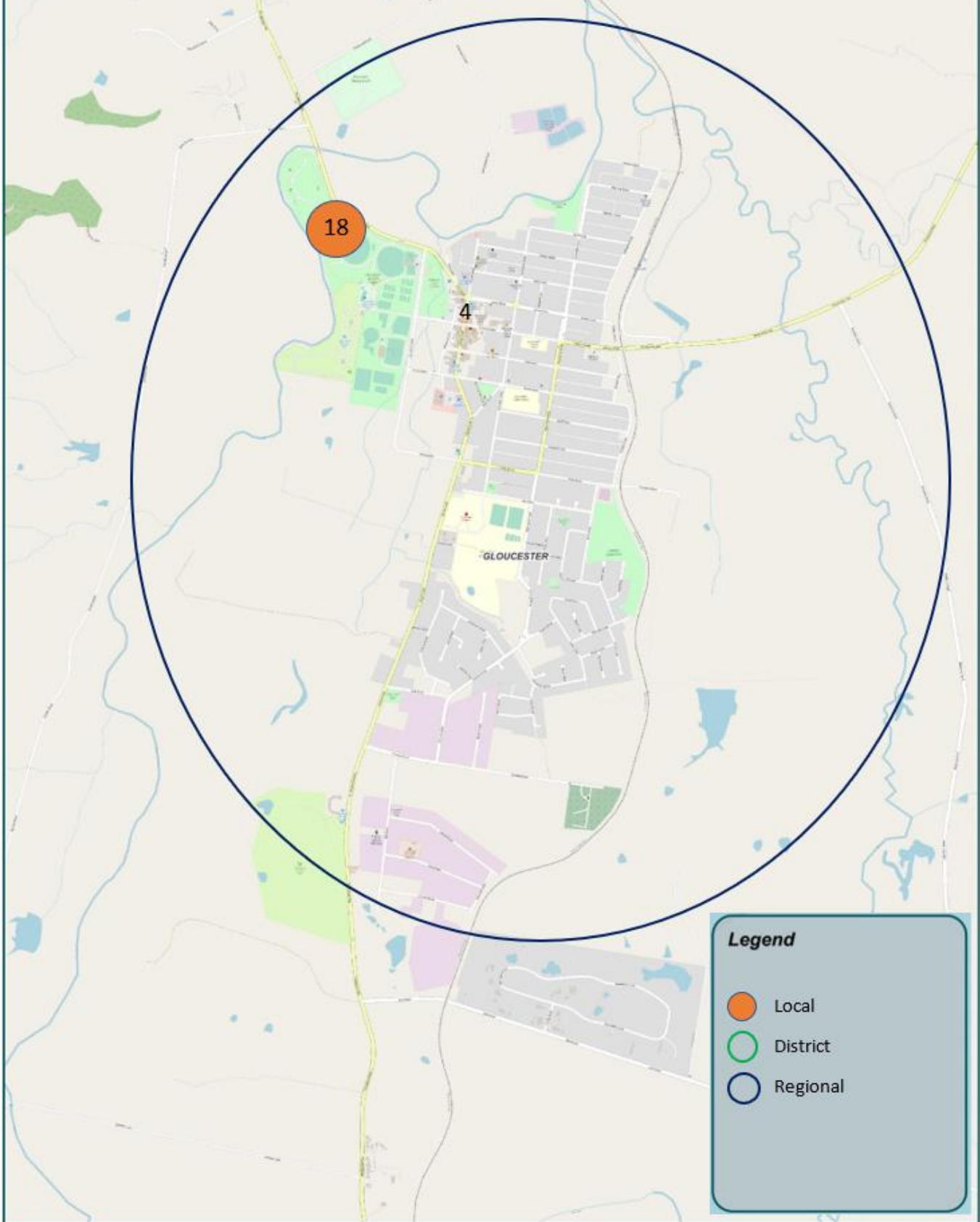
Skateparks are vital community infrastructure, which provide critical community outcomes. However, they are also very expensive to provide. This strategy sets out why we provide skateparks, with a view to providing outstanding community outcomes, but also ensuring that these facilities are where they need to be, and that we can maintain them. As noted previously, some of our skate facilities are not in the right locations.

The table below lists those to be removed, the rationale for removal, and what is being provided to replace them.

Park #	Site	Suburb	Action	Priority			Rationale
				S	M	L	
2	Barrington Park	Barrington	Remove.	X			This skate facility is poorly located and is not providing community outcomes. The basic design is old, and compared to contemporary designs is not attracting participants. The upgraded Regional Skatepark in Gloucester will cover this small catchment.
3	Moorooba Reserve	Coomba Park	Remove.	X			This facility is in very poor condition and its design is not conducive to beginner riders. The new upgraded Regional skatepark at Tuncurry will cover this catchment.
5	Bottlebrush Reserve	Green Point	Remove at end of life		X		This facility is still providing limited beginner skate value. However, the design is limited, and the catchment in the area does not justify upgrading this facility. The new upgraded Regional skatepark at Tuncurry will cover this catchment when removed.
9	Leone Fidden Reserve	Pindimar	Remove	X			This facility is not being used. It is in poor condition as well as being a very limited and poor design. There is little demand for this facility from the local community. The new District skatepark planned for Providence Park in Hawks Nest will cover this catchment.
13	Myall Reserve	Tea Gardens	Remove		X		This facility is to be removed and a new District skatepark is to be constructed at Providence Park in Hawks Nest. This will bring far greater value from the co-location of several youth-based activities.

# MidCoast Skatepark future locations and catchment

## Gloucester



**Legend**

-  Local
-  District
-  Regional

# MidCoast Skatepark future locations and catchment

## Black Head, Tuncurry, Forster

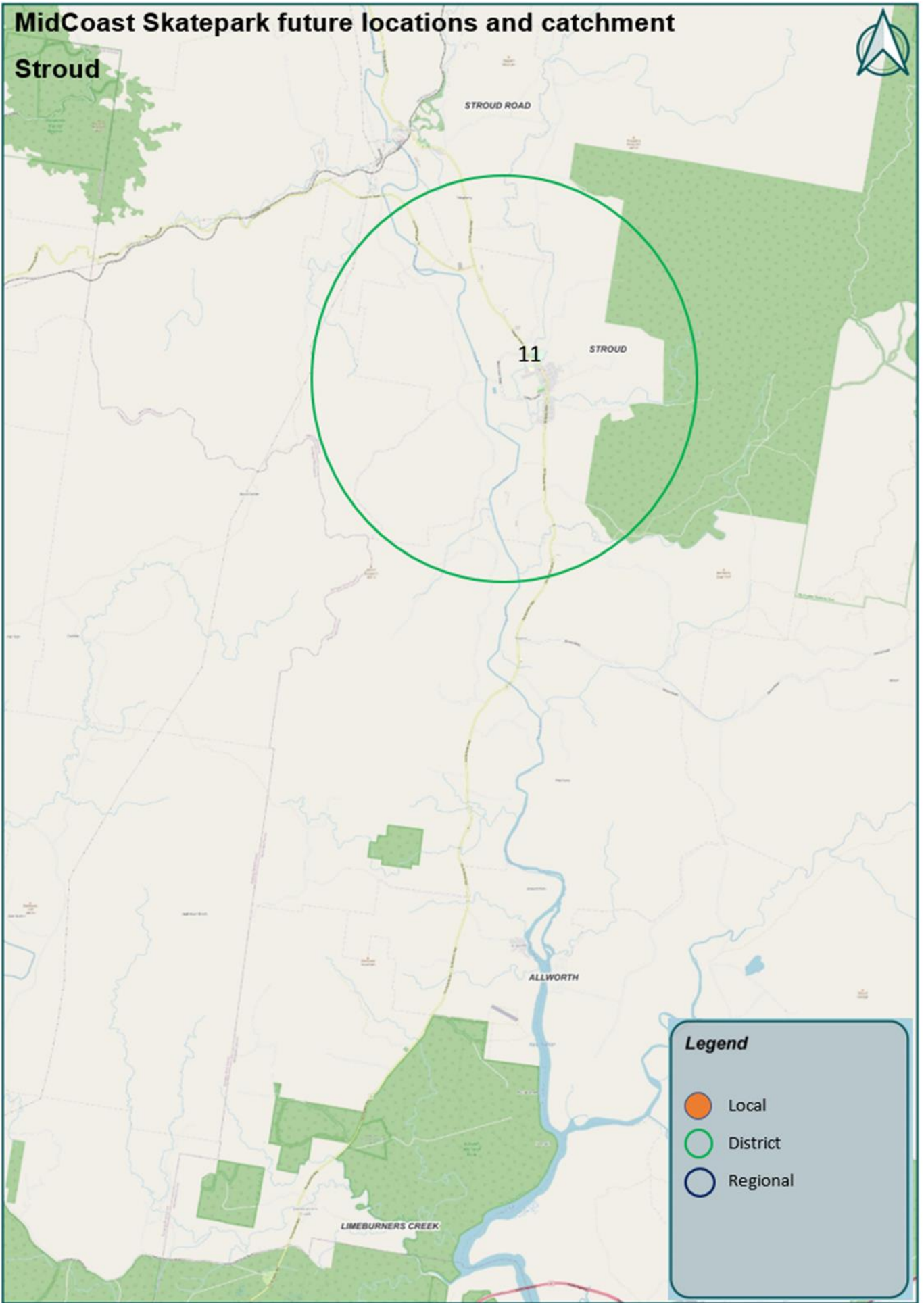


**Legend**

- Local (Orange circle)
- District (Green circle)
- Regional (Blue circle)

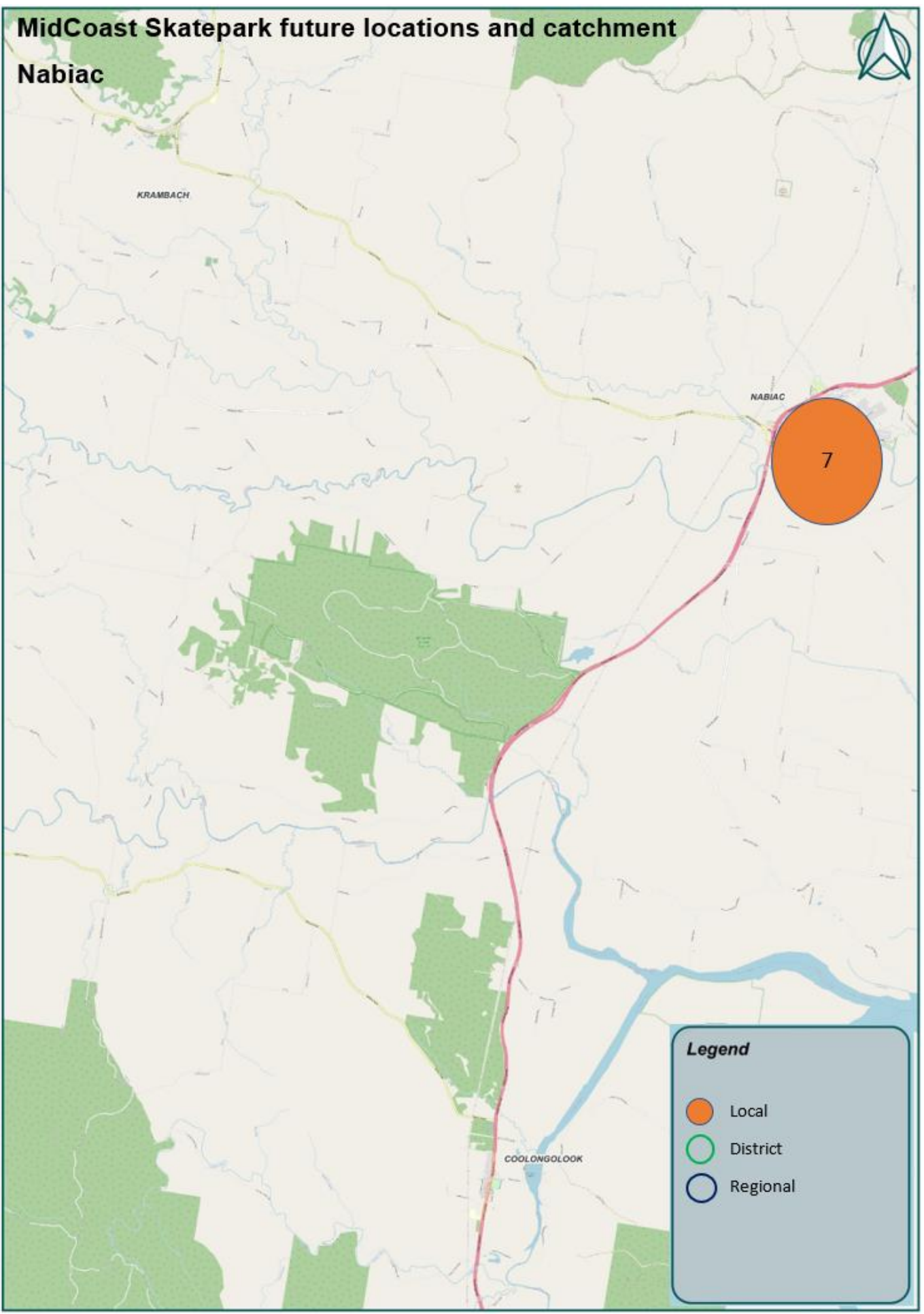
# MidCoast Skatepark future locations and catchment

## Stroud



# MidCoast Skatepark future locations and catchment

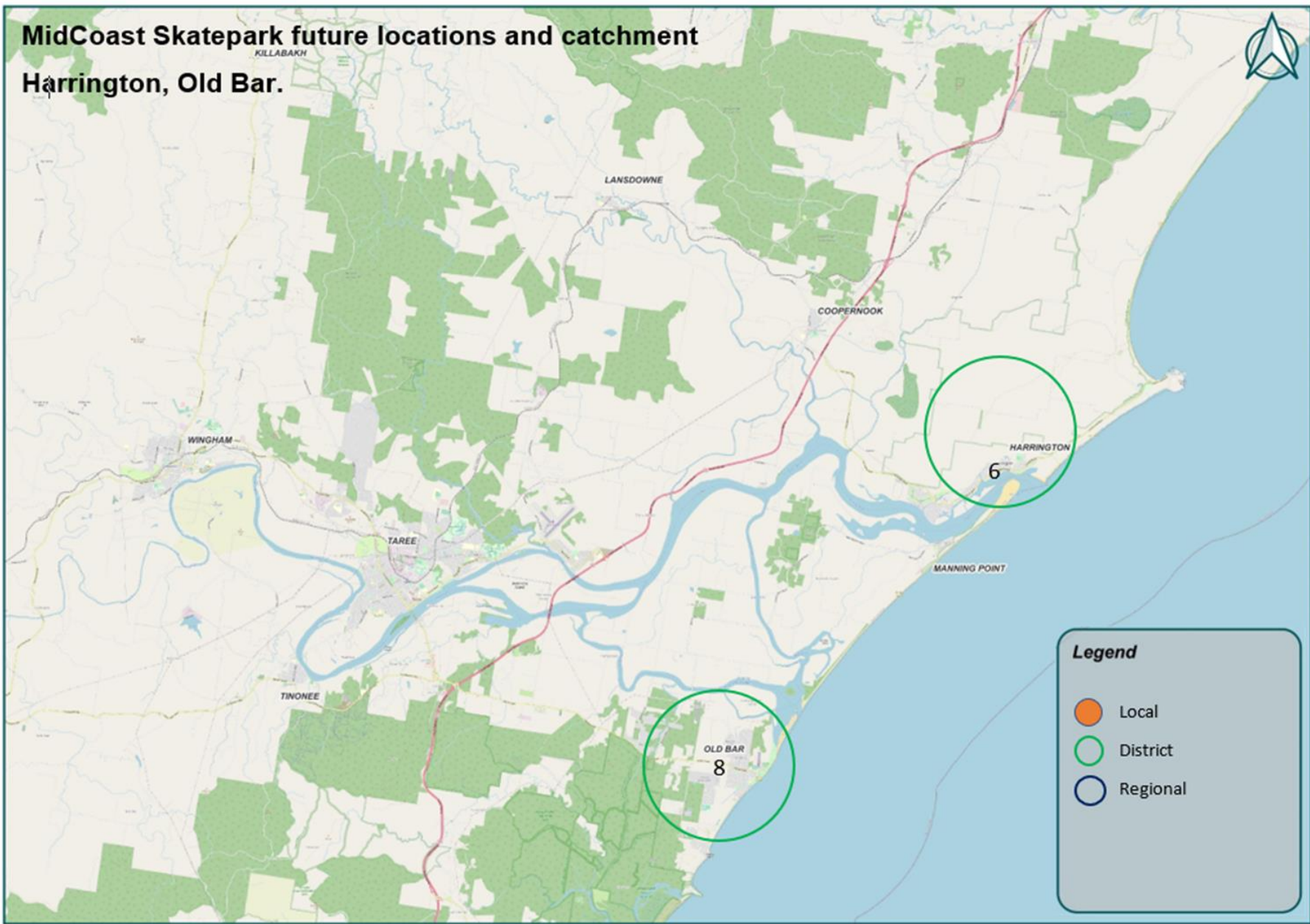
## Nabiac



**Legend**

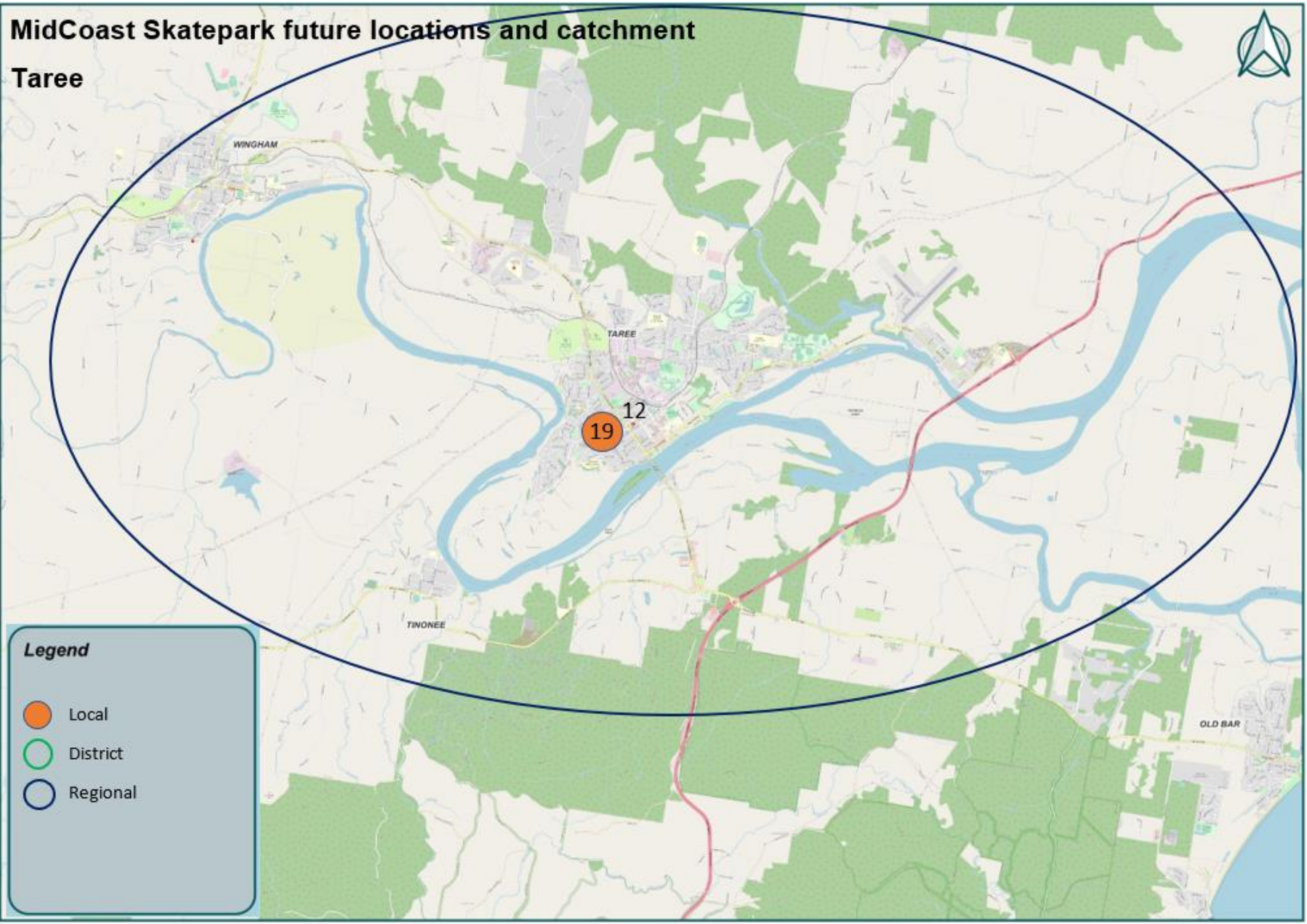
- Local
- District
- Regional





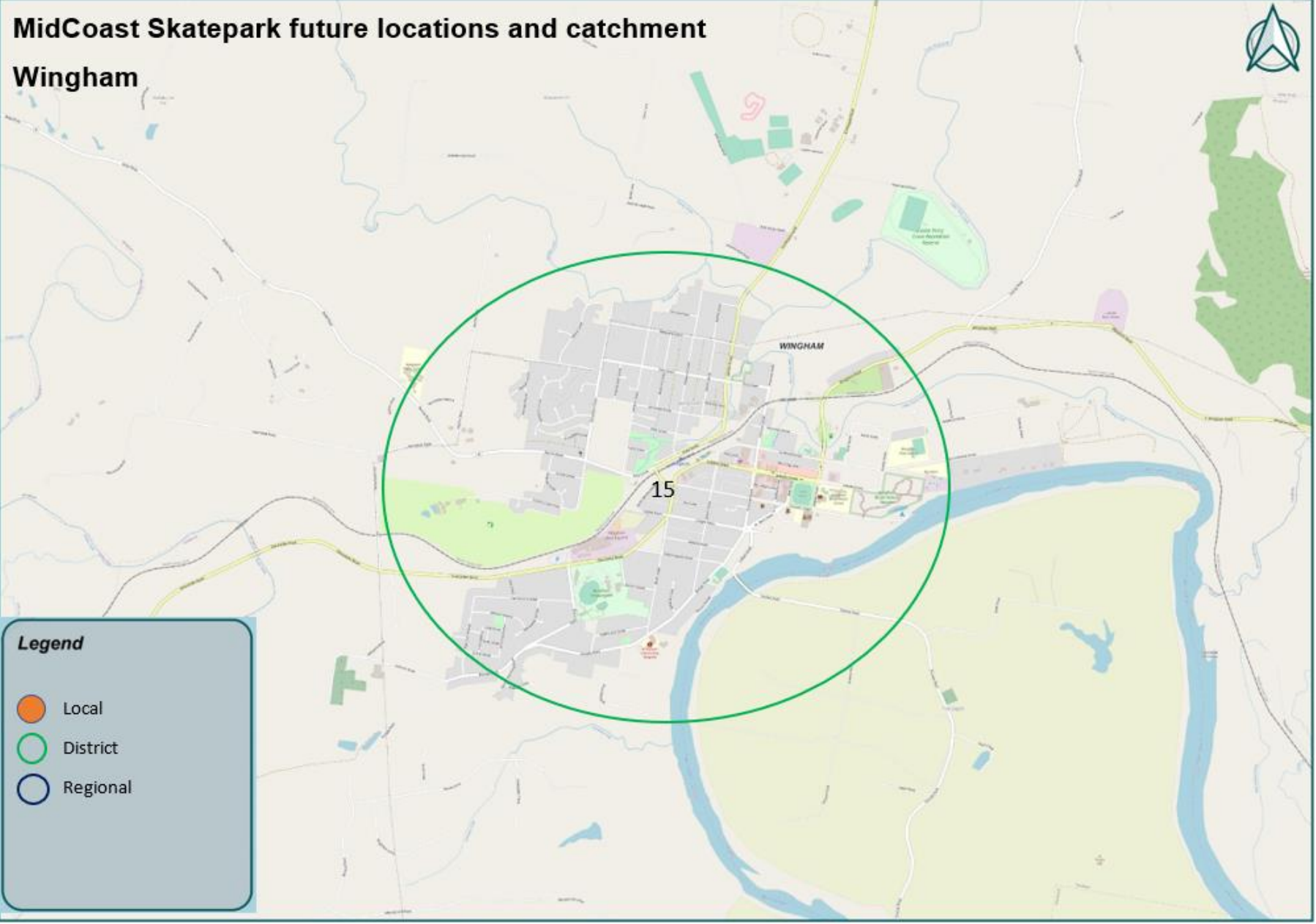
# MidCoast Skatepark future locations and catchment

## Taree



# MidCoast Skatepark future locations and catchment

## Wingham

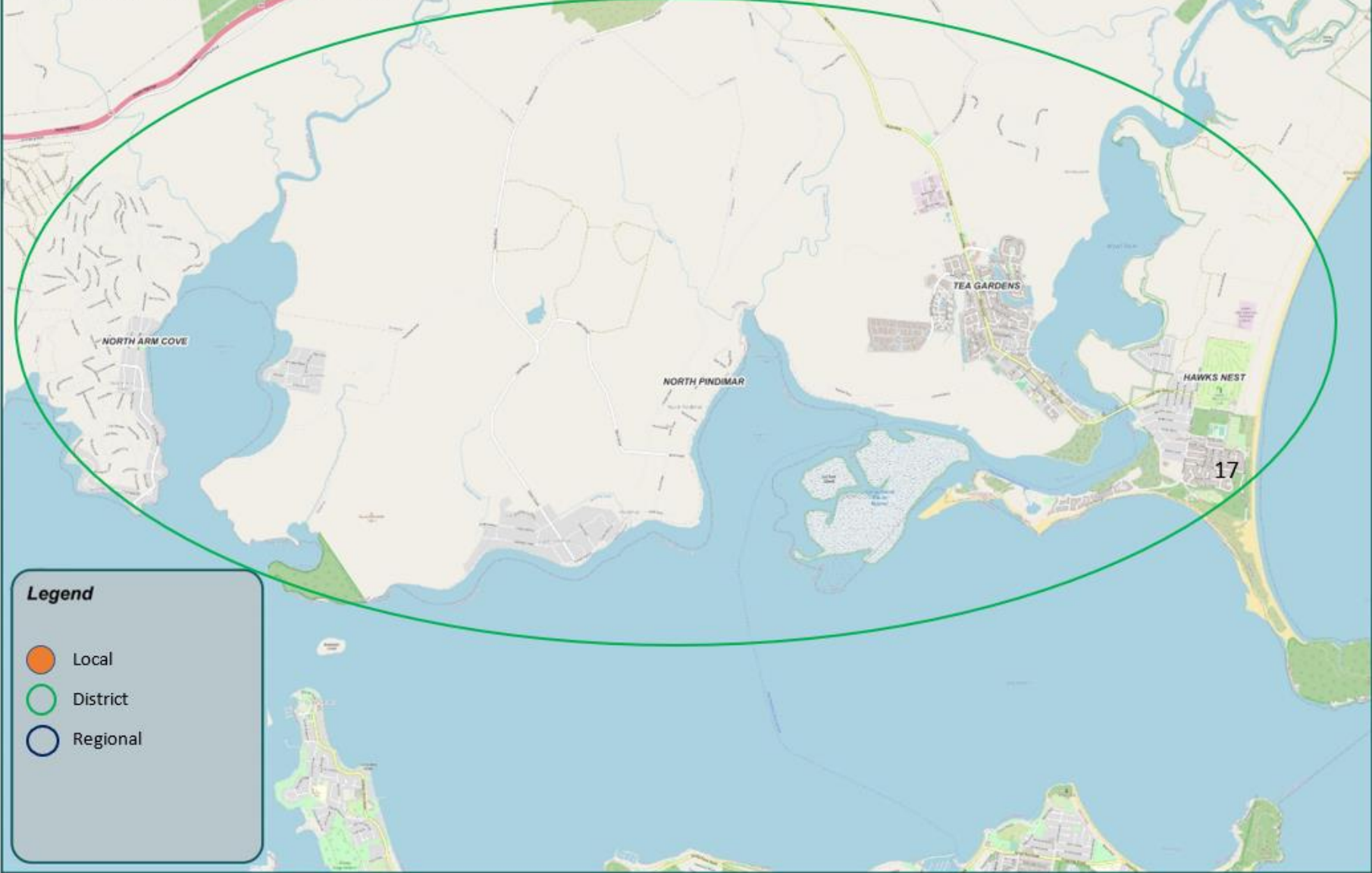


**Legend**

- Local
- District
- Regional

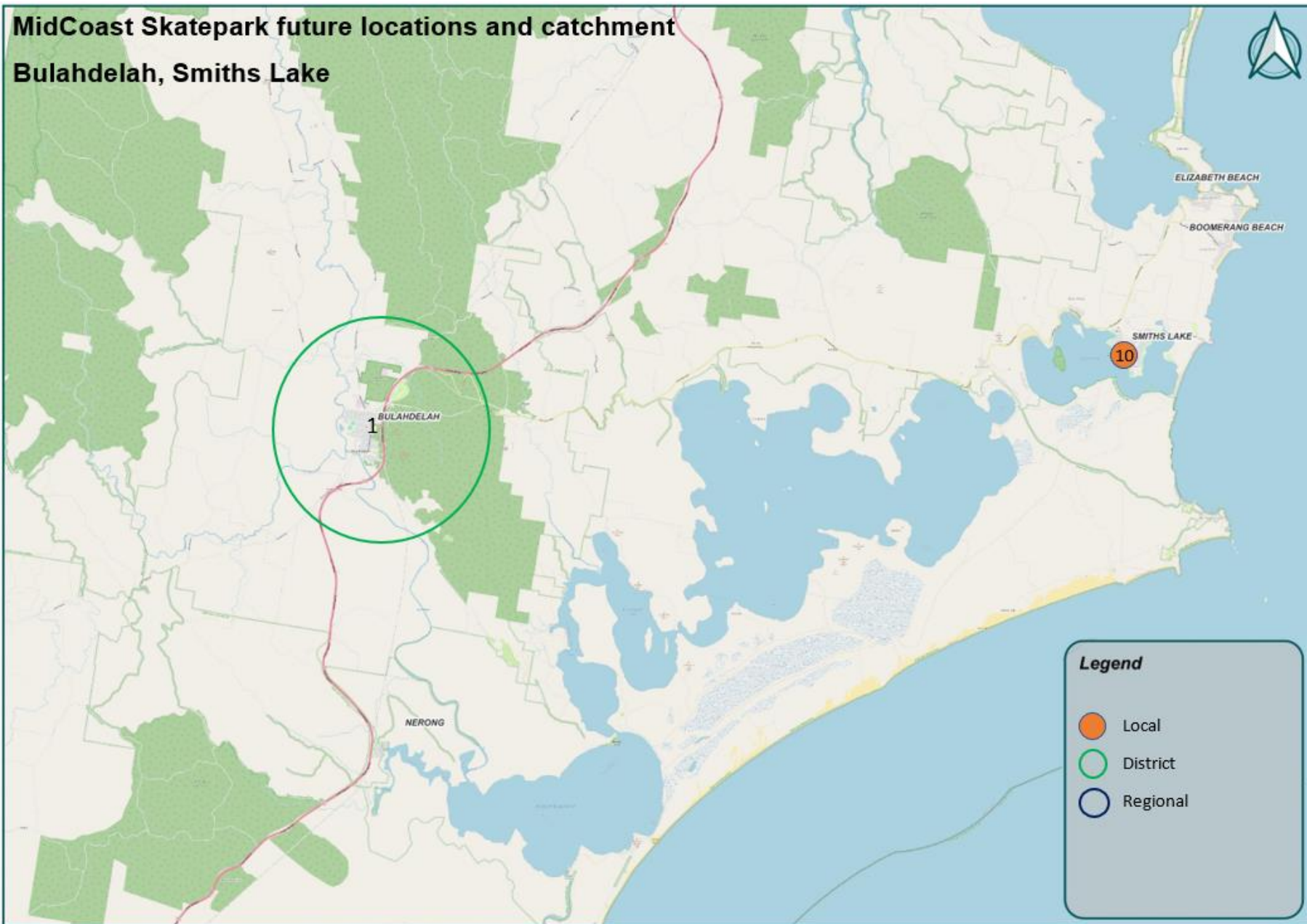
# MidCoast Skatepark future locations and catchment

## Pindimar, Tea Gardens, Hawks Nest



**Legend**

- Local
- District
- Regional





# MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE

## Management and Maintenance

*It's no use building it and then forgetting it, you must maintain it. Our community wants well maintained parks and facilities.*

Our skateparks do not exist in isolation, but rather they are one component of many different types of infrastructure that are located in our parks and reserves. Therefore, it is just as important that we manage the park that the skatepark is in, as it is to manage and maintain the skatepark itself. Unlike playspaces it is not imperative that skateparks are located in our best parks. Because of their construction i.e. concrete, it is desirable not to construct skateparks in parks that families would choose to visit for their natural amenity. We therefore look for areas within our parks where the impact of a concrete structure is less impactful.

In alignment with the MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2035 (OSRS) we will seek to manage our parks and facilities in the face of uncertainty, created by climate change and increasing impacts from overuse, through the impact assessment model. Maintenance of our eco-systems is by far the most critical component of providing high quality spaces for our community. It is fairly easy to build something, but far more difficult to maintain it.

All of the open space in the MidCoast local government area, and their associated buildings and infrastructure are maintained and managed by MidCoast Council. The high level of visitation to our reserves and the use of any infrastructure in them requires careful management and intensive maintenance of infrastructure and resources. Feedback from the *Draft Open Space and Recreation Needs Analysis 2023* indicated that visitors are generally satisfied with the cleanliness and maintenance of the individual parks and reserves. However, the community expect the assets to be maintained to a high standard.

This section of the Strategy details the services that we provide in managing and maintaining the sites to ensure that they are well maintained and therefore will be available for future generations.

In maintaining and managing our public open spaces the following activities are considered:

**Activities and Events:** Some of our reserves are also used for 'one-off temporary events' – the approval for events is assessed on the potential impact and time of the proposed activities, detailed under our Use and Hire of Public Open Spaces.

**Waste Services:** Garbage is collected from individual bin collection areas throughout the parks. Bins are collected by garbage trucks daily, both garbage and recycling trucks enter the neighbouring streets around each reserve. A number of our reserves do not have bins.

**Maintenance:** We oversee all the maintenance requirements of the individual reserves. Council work crews have a program of maintenance seeing them do routine maintenance on a park roster basis. We are generally responsible for maintaining assets such as turf, gardens, paving, roads, fences, handrails and cleaning. We are also responsible for cleaning any facilities and amenities throughout the reserves. A service level review of all maintenance being provided by us is to be conducted in the short term, with a view of developing a Desired Standards of Service model.

**Facility Maintenance:** We maintain the facilities in our public open spaces where they are located.

**Building Maintenance:** Any buildings located in reserves are maintained and repaired by Council

**Environmental Services:** We are responsible for identifying and putting in place energy, water savings and renewable opportunities within reserves. This includes identifying ways to reduce waste to landfill; encouraging visitors to use sustainable transport options; educating the community on the environmental significance of the area; and preparing for the future impacts of climate change.

**Safety and Regulations:** Our rangers patrol the individual parks on a regular basis, enforcing regulations to promote safety and equitable access for visitors. Activities that adversely affect other patrons' pleasure of reserves are regulated. On occasion rangers and other Council staff need to manage antisocial behaviour across the reserves. Controlled activities include dog walking, consumption of alcohol, commercial training, ball games, bicycle riding, skateboard riding, use of portable barbecues and littering. Dogs are allowed off-leash in those reserves that have been chosen for the activity. Where off-leash is not chosen dogs must be on-leash at all times. Dogs are prohibited within 10 metres of children's playgrounds and the barbecues. Dog regulation signage is provided where required.

**Skatepark Maintenance:** Because of the construction material used in skateparks, mainly concrete, and metal, there is very little maintenance required to maintain the structure. A well-constructed skatepark requires very little ongoing maintenance. However, one of the major issues with skateparks is tagging. This is where paint is used to draw on the concrete. Having acrylic paint applied to the concrete makes the surface very slippery, and hence is no longer fit for riding. A well-considered and designed skatepark will not get tagged, as local youth will "protect" it. However, ongoing inspections and removal is an important aspect of skatepark maintenance.

The following regulations are enforced in those public open spaces where indicated:

- No alcohol
- No camping or staying overnight
- No un-authorized ball games
- No commercial activities without Council approval
- No skateboards or rollerblades (outside of skateparks)
- No kites or kite activities
- No portable barbecues or open fires
- No smoking on the beach

It is our aim to keep vehicular activity within our parks to a minimum. However, it is necessary for service vehicles to access our reserves. Oftentimes access is gated to individual parks. Vehicles that require access include the garbage truck and staff with Utes. Occasional access is required by other agency vehicles. Emergency vehicles may require access to individual reserves. When service vehicles do access parks all care is taken, and public safety is paramount.





# FINANCIALS

## Financials

Funding for implementing this strategy will either be allocated for future upgrade works (capital works) or maintenance and management. Funding for the management and maintenance is currently provided through our annual budget allocation.

To fund the proposed new or upgrade works, we will set aside capital works funds in future years that will cover a percentage of the proposals in the strategy, which will be combined with any future grant funding.

Council's budget for the strategy is not expected to accommodate all proposals in the short- or long-term plan.

Additional funding options that may be investigated include:

- State and federal grants
- Voluntary planning agreements
- Section 7.11 development contributions
- Partnerships with community groups or businesses.

The amount of funding through these streams is difficult to anticipate as it is dependent on grant programs.

## Financial

The sustainable protection of our public open spaces, and the embellishment that we undertake on them to meet community need is expensive. The Action Plan in this strategy represents a significant investment by Council in the long-term viability of our public open space portfolio. The life cycle of this strategy is 12 years, and so the projects identified form a works schedule for that period. All projects have been given a time period priority, based on their importance to the community, and to ensure that infrastructure on our open spaces meet contemporary standards and remain safe and functional.

We do not bare all the financial burden of maintaining world class open space and facilities. Both state and federal governments acknowledge their role in protecting our environment, as well as ensuring that our communities are healthy, happy and active. They therefore provide contributing funds to the provision and upgrading of open space infrastructure. However, ongoing cost (OPEX – Operational Expense) is borne exclusively by us. Therefore, the projects identified in the Action Plan have been well considered and have been driven by feedback provided by the community, on what they want their open spaces to be.

Even though the projects in this strategy are meant to be delivered within the life cycle of this plan, it is anticipated that some may not. In these cases, those projects will be tested in future reviews of the strategy, and if confirmed that they are still needed they will be “rolled over” into future versions.

## How did we prioritise the actions?

We used four connected decision drivers to identify both the actions and their priority.

These are listed in the table below:

Decision Driver	Rationale
Evidence approach	Each action has been tested through community feedback, analysis of community need, analysis of current activity trends and its impacts on the environment. The priority placed on each action is a result of analysis of the impact on either the community or the environment if that project is not undertaken.
Equitable provision	Actions were also developed through an equitable lens, in that each location within the LGA was considered for what they have received in the past, how long since that location received a new facility and the feasibility of delivering their individual projects at a certain point in time (eg availability of funding).
Asset portfolio condition	As has been noted in OSRS the state of our recreation portfolio is aged, and some of the individual components are no longer fit for purpose. In developing the actions and their priorities the condition of existing infrastructure, and its projected life was a strong determinant in setting its priority.
Financial Sustainability	The prioritisation of the actions in the Action plan, and the ability for projects to progress to delivery in the future, has also been influenced by considering the associated financial operating model and/or the long-term asset management requirements in minimising future financial burdens to Council. This financial planning of actions also includes the consideration of access to future potential funding programs, the funds of which the vast majority of the actions will require.

If circumstances change, such as new funding programs, changes within individual communities, or changes in community participation we will revisit the priorities. This might mean a community comes to us and asks for a project to be brought forward, which, when considered, can be done, we will.

Not all actions listed will be completed in the life cycle of the Strategy. The review process identified will re-consider each action to ascertain its continuing applicability.

## Estimated Costs

Even though it is not possible to predict the exact cost of a specific recreation asset, such as a skatepark, until after procurement has taken place it is possible to provide an indication of a price range. This is based on past skatepark provision, which aligns with the specific hierarchy of playspace.

In the table below are the estimated cost ranges:

Skatepark Type	Estimated Cost (2023)
Local	\$200,000 - \$300,000
District	\$500,000 - \$700,000
Regional	\$1,000,000 >

Considering these ranges and taking the upper of the range it is possible to estimate the total cost of all the projects indicated in the Action Plan.

The totals of new and upgraded facilities per hierarchy, and the total cost are:

Skatepark Type	Number	Cost
Local	3	\$900,000
District	2	\$1,400,000
Regional	4	\$4,000,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>\$6,300,000</b>

These indicative costs are a guide for planning. As detailed in other places in the Strategy recreation infrastructure, including skateparks, often are not the sole responsibility of Council to fund. There are a number of agencies whose funding programs are designed to provide contributing funding towards recreation infrastructure construction. It is our aim to utilise these funding programs to deliver as many of the new and upgraded skateparks as we can.

### Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) for Recreation Infrastructure

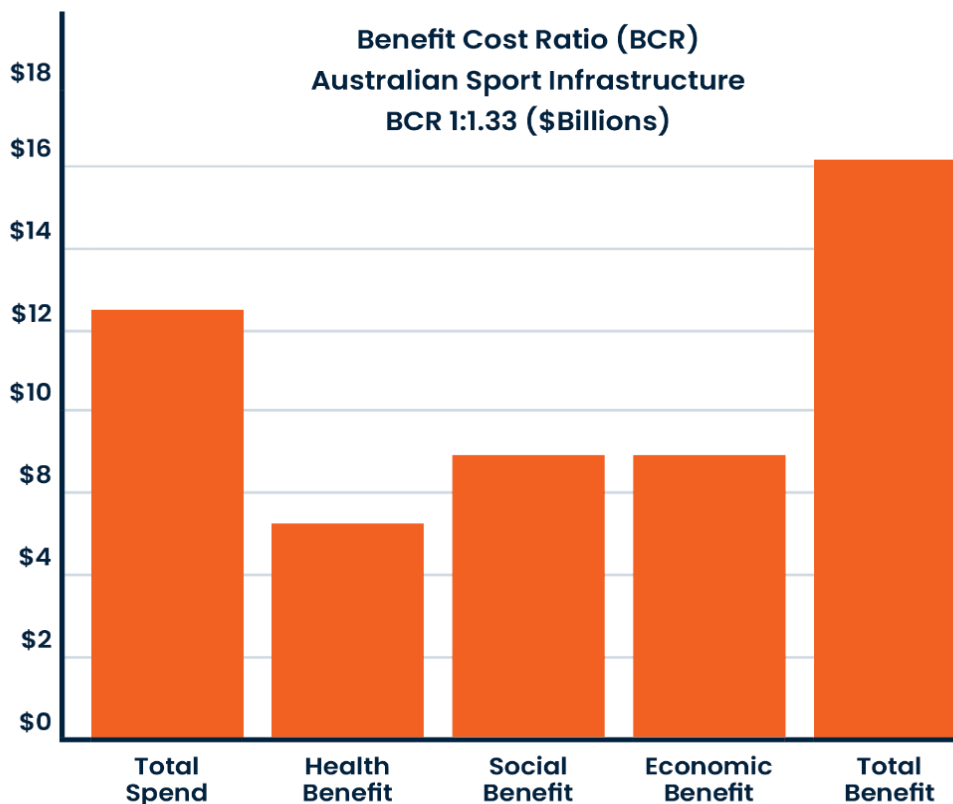
In 2021 the consultancy firm KPMG was commissioned by Sport & Recreation Victoria to produce a report on the value of recreation infrastructure to Australia, called “*The value of community sport and active recreation infrastructure*”<sup>4</sup> report. KPMG found that in any given year approximately \$12B is spent by all levels of government, and the private sector, on sport and recreation infrastructure in Australia. KPMG estimated that for this \$12B we receive a benefit of \$16B, broken into three distinct categories: economic, social and health benefits.

Infrastructure Australia (IA), the peak government advisory agency, tasked with prioritising infrastructure projects and funding use the Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) system to identify the value that infrastructure projects bring to Australia, and to decide whether a specific project should or should not be funded. The BCR is a simple equation that shows whether the return from a project exceeds the capital expense of the project. To calculate the BCR they take the total cost, and then divide it by the economic gain from the project. If the BCR is greater than 1.0 then the return is greater than the expense, if the BCR is less than 1.0 then the expense will exceed the gain.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://sport.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0030/155685/Value-of-Community-Sport-Infrastructure-FINAL-REPORT.pdf](https://sport.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0030/155685/Value-of-Community-Sport-Infrastructure-FINAL-REPORT.pdf)

When we input KPMG’s work into the IA’s BCR equation the BCR for recreation infrastructure is 1.33. That means that for every dollar that we spend on recreation infrastructure there is a return, to the community of \$1.33.



*Case Study*

*Council receives a \$1M grant to build a new Regional skatepark. Council contributes \$1M, giving a \$2M budget. Once the project is completed the entire \$2M has been spent. The value of that project to the community is \$2,266,000.*

**Ongoing financials – Maintenance**

Recreation infrastructure is often highly dynamic, technical, innovative and bespoke. Open spaces themselves, unless they are national parks, being preserved in their natural state for ecosystem and diversity protection, require regular maintenance to maintain them to a standard that is acceptable to the community. Our ultimate outcome is for our open spaces to be visited by the community, to achieve that outcome the open spaces must be maintained. However, that comes with costs.

These costs are ongoing and are often referred to as OPEX (Operational Expense). Maintenance forms one component of OPEX, but which is the most visual, with Council staff often seen in our open spaces doing maintenance. These operations come at a cost. Below is an indicative table for general maintenance of public open spaces. It should be noted that MidCoast Council has an open space portfolio of 1600ha (16,000,000m<sup>2</sup>).

## Ongoing financials – OPEX

Recreation infrastructure involves a substantial upfront cost, commonly referred to as CAPEX (Capital Expense). This is often funded through a combination of state and federal government grants and council contributions. However, there are also significant ongoing costs, commonly referred to as OPEX (Operational Expense). OPEX is always borne by Council, as there are no funding programs that provide grants for OPEX. OPEX can include costs such as ongoing maintenance to the facility, insurances and depreciation. It is the depreciation cost that is the most significant, but which also is the most unconsidered. Depreciation is a figure calculated on the life of the asset. If an asset cost's \$2m to provide (CAPEX) and its life is 20 years, then a depreciation cost needs to be carried by Council's budget for each year of the asset's lifecycle. Many councils do not calculate depreciation, assuming that the money will be found when the asset needs replacing.

The table below shows the depreciation for the standard range of recreation infrastructure.

Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Financial Analysis - OPEX										
Financial	Regional Playspace Upgrade	Local Playspace Upgrade	Sport Amenity Building	District Sports Facility Upgrade	Regional Sports Facility Upgrade	BMX Facility	Skatepark	Sports Lighting	Synthetic	Courts
Cost	\$2,000,000	\$250,000	\$1,200,000	\$3,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$750,000	\$500,000	\$2,000,000	\$60,000
Depreciation – future	\$133,000	\$16,600	\$40,000	\$100,000	\$166,667	Nil	\$20,000	\$416,667	\$860,000	\$3,000
Total future costs	\$133,000	\$16,600	\$40,000	\$100,000	\$166,667	Nil	\$20,000	\$416,667	\$860,000	\$3,000
	Assume life @ 15 years		Assume life @ 50 years					Assume life @ 20 years	Assume life @ 10 years	

## Project Assessment

An open space and recreation infrastructure scoring matrix has been developed to help assess future projects and inform Capital Works programs. The matrix can be used for two specific purposes, namely, to ascertain if a project should proceed, and to compare one potential project with another. It is not required to be used for projects already endorsed by Council through adopted master plans, developer contribution plans or similar strategic plans. The matrix is an assessment model that details key criteria and includes an associated scoring mechanism. This tool will assist us in comparing one project against another when funding is limited.

Each question has been given a weighting, as some questions carry more importance than others. For example, priority 1 *“Aligns with the Open Space & Recreation Strategy”* carries more significance as projects identified in the Action Plan of the Strategy have been tested with the community, against Council internal priorities and have been considered in our long-term financial planning.

To calculate the weighting on each criterion they have been placed in order of importance, with a percentage weighting allocated to each depending on importance.

## Scoring Matrix for Prioritising Open Space and Recreation Facility Projects

Priority	Criteria	Value	Score
Essential	Is project permissible under the Transport and Infrastructure SEPP	Y / N	N/A
Essential	Has Native Title been considered	Y / N	N/A
Essential	If on Crown Land, is it consistent with the Plan of Management	Y / N	N/A
Essential	Is there a current land claim on the land	Y / N	N/A
1	Aligns with the Open Space & Recreation Strategy	Y / N	20
2	Project identified in an individual Strategy	Y / N	15
3	Part of an endorsed master plan	Y / N	15
4	If not addressed, there is a high-risk exposure to Council	Y / N	10
5	Addresses safety and risk management issues	Y / N	10
6	Has lower impact on future Council operating expenditure	Y / N	5
7	Identified as a high need in other Council strategies	Y / N	5
8	Has minimum impact on sensitive environmental or cultural areas	Y / N	5
9	Improves participation opportunities for people with disabilities	Y / N	5
10	Facility is situated within high growth area	Y / N	2
11	Existing facility is at capacity	Y / N	2
12	Improves the functionality of land (drainage, lighting, amenities, parking)	Y / N	2
13	Benefits multiple community user groups	Y / N	2
14	Addresses lack of facility provision	Y / N	1
15	Is eligible for council funding or has high potential of partnership funding	Y / N	1

Note: Pass score is 65. This does not mean that the project will proceed, dependant on funding and approvals

## Grant Management

The majority of recreation infrastructure provided on public open space by local government is funded, either jointly or fully, by grants. These grant programs are administered by either the NSW or Federal governments, through numerous funding programs. MidCoast Council does not have the financial resources to be able to fund all projects that need to be undertaken on our public open spaces, and so relies upon grants. Both Council and community groups are often eligible to apply for grants.

Council relies on community groups to not only make us aware of what they want, but also to advocate for it. Community advocates speaking with state and federal MP's can often motivate their representatives to provide grant funding. There are several funding programs that are designed for local MPs to work with the community to identify and then apply for funding. We encourage community groups to be active in this regard.

## Review and monitoring

If this strategy is to remain relevant in the future it is essential that its implementation is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure any relevant changes are incorporated. Changes that may need to be addressed include changes in community participation, project priorities, funding resources and new opportunities for future upgrades.

Given that community expectation and requirements change over time, this strategy also needs to have some flexibility to adapt to any changes of circumstance.

It is recommended that the strategy be reviewed in the following sequences and time spans:

- Annually; review progress and delivery of action plan
- Every two years: review management and administration structures and update priorities
- Every five years: do a major review of all analysis and rationale. Review results against survey information, photographic record and register of correspondence.
- Every 10 years: update the strategy.



