

The Hon. Ron Hoenig MP

Leader of the House in the Legislative Assembly
Vice-President of the Executive Council
Minister for Local Government



Our Ref: A989543

His Worship the Mayor
Cr Cameron McDonald
The Council of the Municipality of
Kiama

Mrs Jane Stroud
General Manager
The Council of the Municipality of
Kiama

via email: cameron.mcdonald@kiama.nsw.gov.au , janes@kiama.nsw.gov.au
cc: council@kiama.nsw.gov.au

Dear Cr McDonald and Mrs Stroud,

I write to you regarding a refresh to the framework that governs Joint Organisations (JOs) in NSW.

While visiting councils across the State, I have heard clearly that the JO model is not delivering for all councils. Five of the 13 JOs are in hiatus and some councils wish to collaborate with different JOs than the ones they were assigned to in 2018. While some groups of Councils work very well within the JO format, others prefer to use Regional Organisations of Councils to collaborate.

As a former President of a Regional Organisation of Councils, I know first-hand that regional collaboration can deliver better policy outcomes and improved service delivery for communities – but only when it is voluntarily led by civic leaders in a region, who can see a political and organisational benefit from co-operating. Councils should be free to collaborate in a form they see fit, and I want to ensure the State is not putting unnecessary restrictions or requirements on how you may wish to come together.

I have asked the Office of Local Government to undertake a review of JO memberships and boundaries. Existing JOs that are in hiatus may apply to be wound up and councils may apply to join a different JO to the one they are currently in. Should metropolitan councils wish to form JOs, that can be considered through this process.

I intend that the arrangement of Joint Organisations produced through this review should be consistent for at least a period of four years in order to provide certainty to Government agencies that provide grants, as well as for strategic planning and organisational purposes. In the long-run, the Government intends to perform regular reviews of Joint Organisation memberships within 12 months of regularly scheduled Local Government elections.

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Enclosure 1

To deliver this opportunity, I am seeking your advice and intention on whether your council wants to be a member of a JO, and the JO that it would like to join, create, withdraw from, or retain membership of.

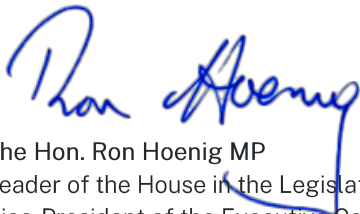
I invite you, along with all councils in NSW, to provide this information back to OLG by **5pm, Tuesday 31 March 2026**. Based on your preferences, the NSW Government will then prepare a new suite of proclamations for the Governor to reset JO statuses, memberships, boundaries and governance arrangements for NSW.

By writing to every Lord Mayor and Mayor in the State, I am giving you an opportunity to talk to your colleagues and present me with a lasting, council-driven solution to regional collaboration.

I have asked Brett Whitworth PSM, Deputy Secretary of Office of Local Government in the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure to organise a number of information sessions to help address any questions that you may have. More information on these sessions, and this process, will be available shortly.

Please provide your preferences directly to OLG at councilengagement@olg.nsw.gov.au. If you have any further questions, please contact OLG's Engagement team on 02 4428 4100 or your OLG Council Engagement Manager.

Yours sincerely,



The Hon. Ron Hoenig MP
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9 February 2026

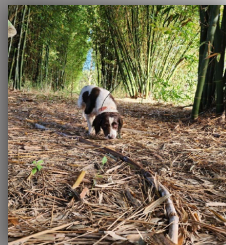
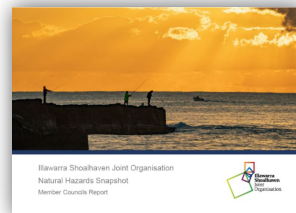
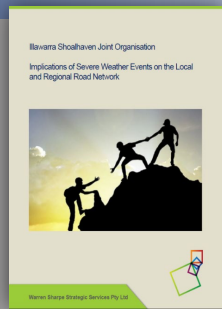
ISJO

2025: The year in review



Item 12.3

Enclosure 2



Chair's Foreword

The Illawarra Shoalhaven Joint Organisation (the ISJO) is a statutory body under the NSW Local Government Act and is the umbrella organisation for local government in the Illawarra Shoalhaven Region.

The ISJO has four Member Councils: Wollongong City Council, Shellharbour City Council, Kiama Municipal Council and Shoalhaven City Council. These Councils are responsible for a land area of 5,656 square kilometres and a population over 430,000. Our region contributes over \$23 billion to the national economy. 212,000 people have their jobs here.

Wollondilly Shire Council is an Associate Member of the ISJO. Wollondilly Shire has a population of 61,442 and a Gross Regional Product in excess of \$3.16 billion.

The Illawarra Shoalhaven is one of our State's most significant contributors to economic growth, employment and housing and we are proud of our longstanding record of local government cooperation and State and Commonwealth Agency partnership.

Our Regional Organisation continued in 2025 to demonstrate its high level of performance in working with Member Councils and State Agencies on issues and opportunities that matter most to our regional community. These issues and opportunities include but are not limited to Sustainability, Resilience, Environmental Protection, Connectivity, Economic Development and Employment Growth. Ample evidence of this achievement and true innovation at a Regional and State level is provided in the pages that follow.

I commend the collaborative work of the ISJO and local government generally in our Region and look forward to our leadership role and contribution developing even further in the year ahead.



A clear, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Homer'.

Chris Homer
Shellharbour City Mayor and
Chair, the Illawarra Shoalhaven Joint
Organisation

The history of local government cooperation in our Region

The Illawarra Shoalhaven Joint Organisation came into being on 1 July 2018 following a three-year period in which our region trialled, in pilot form, the Joint Organisation model.

Prior to 2015 local government in our broader region worked together under the umbrella of the Southern Councils Group.

The Southern Councils Group developed from the Illawarra Region of Councils (IROC) which began operation in 1985 and carried on until 2004.

An even earlier grouping of Councils, the Illawarra Regional Organisation (Region 11), commenced in 1975 and operated until 1979.

In all its incarnations, local government cooperation in our region has had a common theme: that of a voluntary collective of Local Government Authorities working together to promote and foster the sustainable development of our region by building on our unique and diverse economic, natural and cultural heritage.

ISJO Statement of Strategic Regional Priorities 2035



In December 2025 the ISJO adopted its Statement of Strategic Regional Priorities 2035.

The Local Government (General) Amendment (Regional Joint Organisations) Regulation 2018 requires that Joint Organisations such as the ISJO prepare a Statement of Strategic Regional Priorities that draws from its Member Council Community Strategic Plans (CSPs), regional plans and other strategic documents to clearly identify the key areas of focus for the Joint Organisation in the years ahead.

Individually and collectively the strategic frameworks developed at a local, regional and beyond region level have a profound influence on the future of our region and the well-being of its residents.

In the context of these plans, the ISJO's Statement of Strategic Regional Priorities serves as a communication link between the local and State Government strategic frameworks that impact on and guide the future of our region. It facilitates shared understanding of these frameworks and, importantly, it promotes intergovernmental cooperation and targeted resource allocations that will assist in the achievement of the short, medium and long term goals of the entities with which the ISJO and its Member Councils work.

Community Strategy Plans describe a community's vision and aspirations for a period of ten or more years.

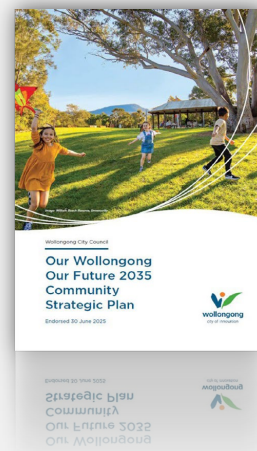
The process for creating a CSP is led by the Mayor and Councillors and through engagement with the community. The CSP is the community's plan for its future and councils have a custodial role in engaging, refining and preparing the plan on the community's behalf. As it is possible the community will identify aspirations that are not council's full responsibility role to implement, councils may need to partner with state government agencies and community groups in a CSP's delivery.



ISJO Member Council Community Strategic Plans

Key requirements in a Community Strategic Plan are:

- The plan must be for a minimum of 10 years
- It must identify community priorities and aspirations
- It is to include a vision statement, strategic objectives and strategies to achieve those objectives
- It must address the quadruple bottom line: social, environmental, economic and civic leadership issues
- It must be based on social justice principles: equity, access, participation and rights
- It is to give due consideration to State Government plans and other relevant state and regional plans.



How our Strategic Priorities were developed

An analysis was undertaken of ISJO Member Council Community Strategic Plans to identify shared strategic priorities over the next ten years.

Five key goals / themes were identified in both this analysis and a review of other key inputs in the form of the NSW Government Wellbeing Framework, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the priorities of the Southern Region State Agencies Regional Leadership Executive Strategic Plan.

These five key areas of focus now constitute the strategic priorities that will guide the Joint Organisation's strategy and initiative development and form the basis of review and reporting processes in the years ahead.

They are:

1. Environment, Resilience and Sustainability

- 1.1 We will lead efforts to promote and resource climate change adaptation and to embed disaster resilience in planning and resource allocation at all levels
- 1.2 We will role model sustainability in our own practices and, in partnership with other levels of government and peak bodies, will treasure and protect our region's environment, its biodiversity and unique character
- 1.3 We will work to reduce emissions and, through responsible waste management practices, education and an embracing of the circular economy, will put our region at the forefront of initiatives to create a sustainable future.

2. Growing the contribution of our Region's Economy

- 2.1 We will build partnerships to expand access to markets and to help build an interregional case for State and Commonwealth investment in enabling economic, road and rail transport infrastructure including and especially linkages to South West Sydney, Port Kembla and the Western Sydney International Airport
- 2.2 We will work cooperatively with business and government to accelerate region-wide diversification, innovation and skills development and to expand employment opportunities in all sectors including technology-driven manufacturing, research, education, defence and the digital and visitor economies.

3. Connection, Well-Being and Sense of Place

- 3.1 We will collaborate with key agencies to support the delivery of programs that promote connectivity, liveability, safety, health and wellbeing
- 3.2 We will advocate strongly for better and more integrated public transport and for within-region linkages that open up opportunities, assist a more mobile workforce and promote equitable access to education, health and other social services
- 3.3 We will promote active lifestyles, community development, cultural awareness, creativity and a valuing of local character
- 3.4 We will acknowledge and respect the traditional custodians of the land throughout the Illawarra Shoalhaven – the Dharawal, Jerrinja, Wandj Wandj and Wodi Wodi Peoples – and recognise our responsibility to work together with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, families and communities towards improved economic, social and cultural outcomes.

4. Housing

- 4.1 We will contribute to and, where appropriate drive, initiatives to support housing affordability, diversity and availability
- 4.2 We will support programs that identify and assist in the delivery of infrastructure – including social, educational and service infrastructure – to enable housing development in priority growth areas.

5. Strategy, Governance and Partnerships

- 5.1 We will manage our resources wisely and be informative, transparent and trusted decision-makers focused on the values of our community
- 5.2 We will work together as a region, with other regions and peak bodies in local government to ensure that our sector's financial sustainability is ensured and that our collective regional interests are prioritised.

Our Vision Statement remains the Statement adopted in 2019: “A confident, vibrant, safe and productive region that optimises the potential of its people and environment now and into the future”.



The ISJO region leads Regional Project tackling FOGO Contamination and Capacity



Image courtesy of NSW EPA

The ISJO is spearheading an innovative project to solve Food Organics and Garden Organics (FOGO) contamination and processing capacity challenges across the Illawarra region (Wollongong, Shellharbour, and Kiama).

This comprehensive, multi-phase initiative showcases ISJO's leadership in waste management, aiming to turn a current problem – FOGO bin contamination and limited processing options – into an opportunity.

By coordinating efforts at a regional scale, the project seeks to ensure that the FOGO collected from households becomes a valuable resource rather than low value "contaminated oversize" destined for landfill. With only two local landfills serving the Illawarra and organics recycling facilities near capacity, ISJO's work is both urgent and strategic for the region's sustainable future.

A Phased Approach to FOGO Solutions

ISJO's FOGO Contamination and Capacity Project is structured in clear phases, each building on the last to address specific objectives:

1. **Technology Scan & Base Case Analysis:** The project begins by scanning available technologies and methods to reduce FOGO contamination. The team will define the current "base case" (the status quo of FOGO processing in the region) and develop a multi-criteria analysis framework to objectively evaluate potential solutions. By rigorously investigating a range of technologies under local regulatory and operational constraints, Phase 1 establishes a strong evidence base for decision-making.

2. **Options Assessment and Cost-Benefit Evaluation:** In the second phase, a detailed assessment of viable options for managing FOGO is undertaken, including both infrastructure and process improvements. The project will gather data on priority technologies and perform cost-benefit analyses for different scenarios. This includes consulting with reference facilities and industry experts to understand real-world performance and costs. The outcome will be a set of well-costed options and draft guidelines that Illawarra councils can use to compare solutions for reducing contamination and expanding organics capacity.
3. **Dunmore Facility Case Study:** A key feature of the project is applying the research in a practical context. Phase 3 involves a case study at the **Dunmore Organics Processing Facility** (Shellharbour's organics recycling site). The preferred solutions from Phase 2 will be modelled and tested against the "base case" at Dunmore to evaluate their feasibility and impact on the ground. This will produce a detailed report and an outcomes-based case study, including procurement specifications tailored to improving Dunmore's operations. By piloting solutions at Dunmore, the project gains insights that can be applied to actual facility upgrades or new contracts in the region.
4. **Final Phase – Developing a Scalable Regional Model:** In the final phase, the ISJO will synthesize the findings into a regionally relevant and scalable model for FOGO management. The deliverables will include a summary of the technology scan and analysis, cost-benefit guidelines, and a roadmap that Illawarra councils can use for future investments and joint procurement. The model is intended to be modular and evidence-based, so it can guide not only immediate decisions (such as upcoming organics processing contracts) but also long-term strategy. In essence, the Illawarra will have a template for best-practice FOGO management that can adjust as volumes grow, and technology evolves.

Urgency and Regional Context

The project comes at a critical time for the Illawarra. The Illawarra has only two active landfills (operated by Wollongong and Shellharbour councils) and very limited organics processing capacity. With such constrained infrastructure, any increase in contamination or waste volumes can quickly stress the system.

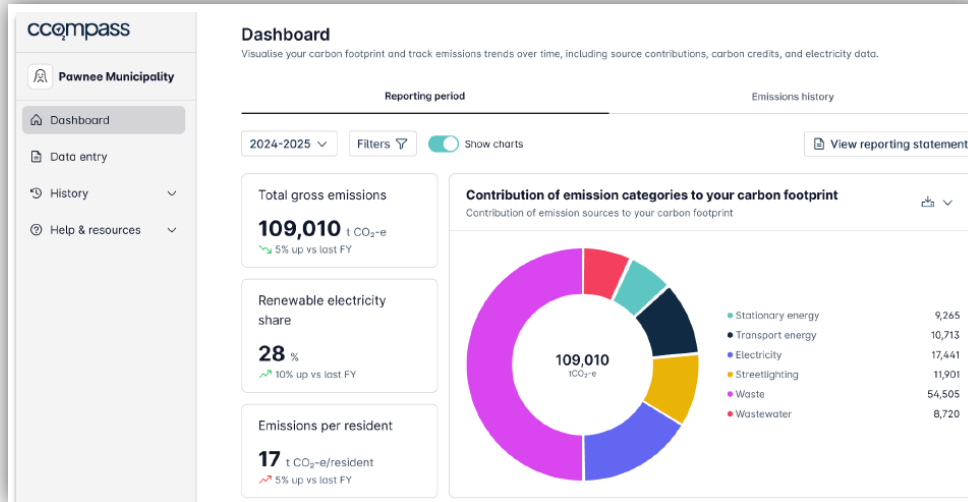
FOGO services are already in place for Illawarra households, but contamination in green bins (e.g. plastics or non-compostable materials mixed with organics) means a significant portion of collected FOGO ends up as low-value residue. At the same time, pressures are mounting to expand organics recycling. The NSW Government has mandated that commercial food organics collections be rolled out from 2025–2026, adding to the volumes needing processing. For the Illawarra, this means not only more FOGO from households, but also new streams of business and institutional food waste coming online in the next few years. Without additional capacity or efficiency improvements, these increased volumes could exceed the region's current processing limits. The Dunmore facility, for instance, has a finite licensed throughput (around 50,000 tonnes per year) and is already one of only two organics recycling facilities in the Illawarra.

In short, doing nothing is not an option.

Leading by Example - Regional Innovation with Broader Impact

Many areas are grappling with similar issues – from contamination in organics bins to insufficient local processing facilities especially as FOGO services expand nationwide. The tools, frameworks, and lessons developed through this project will be transferable to those regions. In the future, a council alliance elsewhere in NSW could replicate the Illawarra's approach, confident that the solutions have been tried and tested.

Tracking towards Net Zero



Sample image of the updated Carbon Compass dashboard displaying emissions categories and their contribution to a Council's overall emissions output.

A key outcome identified in our Joint Organisations Net Zero Acceleration 3.0 Program ([JONZA 3.0](#)) delivery program will be the provision of a tool – the Carbon Compass emissions reporting tool.

Developed by the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) Sustainable Councils Team in collaboration with Net Zero consultancy experts, [100% Renewables](#) the Carbon Compass tool is designed to streamline emissions reporting across regional NSW offering a simple, effective and accessible way to track Council operational emissions.

It is freely available to all JONZA participating Councils

While the ISJO councils already have established emissions reporting practices using a mix of in-house and third-party platforms to report Scope 1 and 2 emissions, the Carbon Compass brings a regional lens to emissions data allowing comparisons across Council areas.

By helping councils align their efforts and improve data consistency, the tool will support the Sustainable Councils team's broader goal of gaining clearer oversight of council emissions as a refining future grant opportunities and implementing targeted support for net zero initiatives.

Carbon Compass is a tool requiring very little technical expertise and is accompanied by step-by-step user guides making it suitable for councils both in the beginning stages of emissions reporting or experienced councils with existing reporting knowledge and expertise.

Carbon Compass:

- Tracks key Scope 1 and 2 emissions including, electricity consumption from council building and streetlights, fleet fuel use, gas usage, wastewater and landfill emissions and green waste
- Supports accurate electricity accounting, distinguishing between grid-supplied and renewable energy sourced electricity
- Provides user-friendly data management, allowing users to upload supporting files and nominate contact persons within Councils to provide emission source data.

- Provides confidence tagging allowing data entries to be marked as actual, estimated, or other levels of certainty.
- Historical data entry, enabling councils to build a comprehensive emissions profile
- Compliance-ready, with alignment to NSW public sector reporting guidelines.

Regional benefits for using the Carbon Compass include:

- Consistency in emissions reporting, enabling better benchmarking and collaboration between councils
- Enhanced data quality and transparency, supporting more informed decision-making and policy development
- Streamlined reporting processes, reducing reliance on external consultants and lowering barriers for councils at different maturity levels

The updated version of the tool has been workshopped with Joint Organisation Net Zero Managers to ensure that it is fit for purpose for council application.

Once available, the Net Zero Program Managers will facilitate data collection exercises with the councils to populate emissions profiles within the tool.

By adopting Carbon Compass, ISJO Councils will have to opportunity to improve emissions reporting standards whilst at the same time aligning reporting frameworks with the broader Joint Organisation network across the State.

Workshops on interregional shared advocacy opportunities



Front row from left to right: Cr Matt Gould, Mayor of Wollondilly, Cr Ashleigh Cagney, Mayor of Camden, Cr Tania Brown, Lord Mayor of Wollongong.

Second row left to right: Cr Matthew Norris, Shoalhaven City Council, Cr Darcy Lound, Mayor of Campbelltown, Cr Cameron McDonald, Mayor of Kiama

Third row left to right: Cr Chris Homer, Mayor of Shellharbour, Cr Jesse Fitzpatrick, Mayor of Wingecarribee

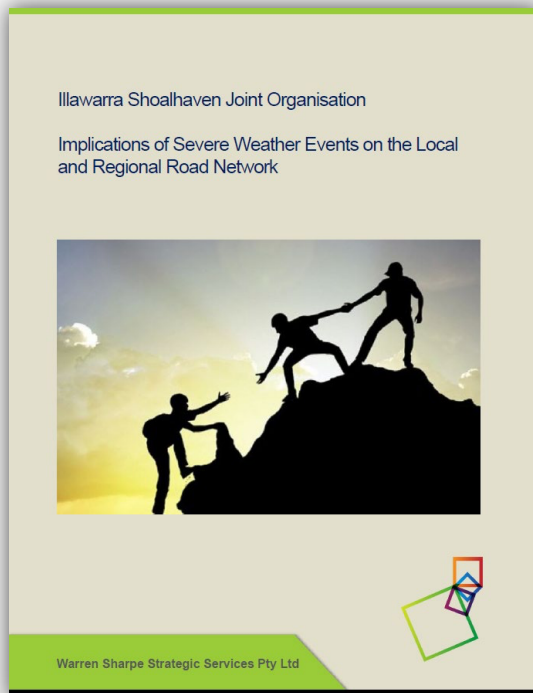
In the second half of 2025 two workshops were held to identify advocacy opportunities that spanned regional boundaries and would contribute to the development of the LGAs involved and their contribution to the State and National Economy.

The participating local government areas comprised Wollondilly Shire, Camden City, Campbelltown City, Wingecarribee Shire, Wollongong City, Shellharbour City, Kiama Municipality and Shoalhaven City.

Opportunities identified for investigation included but were not limited to:

- Interregional Connectivity including road and rail
- Global Gateways including Western Sydney International Airport and Port Kembla
- Housing capacity
- Employment opportunities
- The Visitor Economy, and
- Public Transport

Implications of Severe Weather Events on the Local and Regional Road Network



In the Illawarra Shoalhaven an acceleration in the frequency and severity of natural disasters such as fire and flood has resulted in substantial threats to our communities, major damage to critical local and regional infrastructure, enormous strain on local government finances and deep-seated trauma for communities and first responders.

In recognition of this the ISJO secured funding under the joint Commonwealth / NSW Government National Partnership Agreement on Disaster Risk Reduction to investigate a series of measures to identify and address our region's exposure to disaster risk.

A major part of the work was preparation of an evidence-based review – [Addressing the implications of Severe Weather Events on the Local and Regional Road Network](#) – to highlight the particular challenges for road infrastructure in the Illawarra Shoalhaven region generated by geographic issues specific to our region. By drawing upon actual lived experience arising from the devastating natural disasters and, taking lessons learnt from those disasters, the review offers detailed recommendations for positive change to decision-making in the future.

The review also accessed knowledge gained from assessing the natural disaster impacts affecting communities and Councils across NSW and demonstrates the advantage of sharing many of the lessons learnt from multiple disasters to better address common challenges. The review is therefore very much an advocacy document with powerful, if at times confronting, messages for all levels of Government.



Illawarra Shoalhaven Natural Hazards Snapshot

The Illawarra Shoalhaven region faces a complex and evolving natural hazard landscape, including floods, storms, bushfires, coastal hazards, heatwaves, and landslides and climate change is projected to intensify these risks, increasing the urgency for proactive planning and adaptation.

To support a shared understanding of these challenges, the ISJO has prepared the *Illawarra Shoalhaven Natural Hazards Snapshot*. This report consolidates publicly available data on hazard exposure, historical events as well as future climate projections for the four ISJO member councils.

It also provides localised profiles of risk, resilience, and planned mitigation actions.

The Snapshot is intended as a practical tool for councils, partners, and the community. It will also help provide local context to the NSW Reconstruction Authority for the upcoming Disaster Adaptation Plan process and strengthen alignment between local planning and regional resilience priorities.

Key Features of the Report

- Inclusion of a regional overview of natural hazards and climate projections
- Council-specific profiles detailing hazard exposure, historical disaster impacts, property risk analysis and resilience indices
- A summary of planned disaster risk reduction actions derived from each council's Delivery Program and Operational Plan.
- Data sourced from reputable agencies including ABS, NSW Government, SES, RFS, Climate Council, and Natural Hazards Research Australia.

Next steps

The ISJO is now promoting the report as a resource for councils, agencies and community stakeholders to support risk-informed decision-making and resilience planning.



Building Resilience into IP&R processes

Disaster resilience is increasingly recognised as a critical component of sustainable local governance.

As climate change intensifies and natural hazards become more frequent and severe, councils must proactively embed resilience into their strategic and operational planning frameworks. The Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) framework provides a structured opportunity to do so ensuring that resilience is not treated as a standalone issue but as a cross-cutting priority that influences infrastructure, community wellbeing, environmental stewardship and economic stability.



Early in 2025 the ISJO released its [Regional Resilience Integrated Planning and Reporting Guidance 2025](#) to assist Councils to embed Resilience within their IP&R structures.

Our Planning and Reporting Guidance shows how Resilience initiatives can and should be systemically integrated into Local Government frameworks, plans and tools and how local communities and other key stakeholders can be informed and supported in understanding their role and a Council's role in building climate resilience and a more assured future.

The purpose of our [Building Resilience into IP&R 2025/2026 Member Councils Report](#) is to provide guidance for Member Councils on their progress in strengthening disaster resilience within their IP&R frameworks. It provides a comparative analysis of current approaches and highlights opportunities for improvement and regional collaboration and is intended as a practical reference for embedding resilience across strategic and operational plans.

Installation of Multi-Hazard Monitoring and Sensor Network completed

The Illawarra-Shoalhaven Joint Organisation is committed to building safer, more resilient communities across its member councils. With increasing climate-related risks such as bushfires, storms, and floods, real-time access to environmental data is more critical than ever.

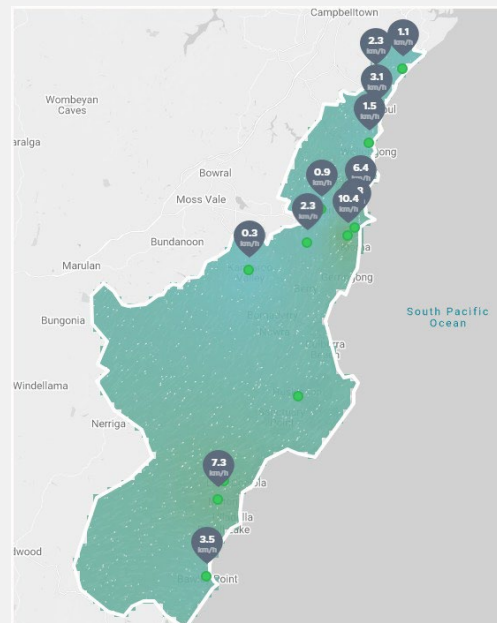
In collaboration with [Attentis Technology](#) and Telstra, and with funding through the Disaster Risk Reduction Fund, the ISJO completed installation in 2025 of a region-wide multi-hazard monitoring network. This system enables councils, emergency services and communities to make faster, better-informed decisions to reduce disaster risk.

Purpose of the Multi-Hazard Monitoring and Sensor Network

The Illawarra-Shoalhaven multi-hazard monitoring and sensor network has been designed to enhance disaster resilience across the region by enabling real-time situational awareness, improved decision-making and stronger community engagement.

Its core purposes include:

- **Early Detection:** The system provides real-time monitoring of natural hazard conditions such as temperature fluctuations, wind activity, smoke presence, humidity, and rainfall. This enables authorities to detect emerging threats early and act before situations escalate.
- **Informed Planning:** By delivering accurate, time-stamped environmental data, the network supports proactive disaster risk reduction strategies, emergency preparedness, and evidence-informed urban and regional planning.
- **Regional Collaboration:** The system facilitates shared access to monitoring data between councils, emergency services, and state agencies. This fosters coordinated responses and enables consistent, region-wide situational awareness.
- **Public Access and Education:** A live public-facing dashboard allows community members to view real-time environmental conditions, helping to raise awareness of local hazards and promote a culture of preparedness and shared responsibility.
- **Evidence-Based Emergency Response:** Live data supports the operational decisions of emergency services, enabling faster and more precise responses during critical events such as bushfires, storms, and floods.



Strengthening Regional Collaboration in Disaster Adaptation Planning

On 28 October 2025 representatives from five Joint Organisations – the ISJO, Canberra Region, Central NSW, Hunter and Riverina and Murray – and the NSW Reconstruction Authority came together for a workshop focused on strengthening regional approaches to the [Disaster Adaptation Plan](#) process across NSW.

The session provided a valuable opportunity to build understanding of the Disaster Adaptation Plan process, to clarify roles and responsibilities and to explore how existing regional projects such as those funded through the [Disaster Ready Fund](#) can align with and inform future planning.



Through a mix of presentations, group discussions and planning activities, participants explored how to tailor the DAP process to local contexts, while also identifying opportunities for coordination and knowledge sharing across regions. The workshop also laid the groundwork for ongoing engagement between the Reconstruction Authority and Joint Organisations including the use of shared platforms and participation in existing Joint Organisation networks.

This workshop marks a significant step in supporting councils and communities to prepare for and adapt to future hazards, ensuring that disaster resilience is embedded in regional planning from the ground up.

Illawarra Circular Precinct Taskforce

The second meeting of the Illawarra Circular Precinct taskforce was held on 5 November 2025 at the University of Wollongong Innovation Campus. The meeting welcomed back the wide range of stakeholders along with various industry and consultancy participants, including but not limited to Circular Australia, Shellharbour and Wollongong Councils, the University of Wollongong, NSW EPA, the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water and the ISJO).

Key content and Insights:

The workshop focused on showcasing success stories, sharing good practises and challenges and creating opportunities for strengthened collaboration between stakeholders.

Updates on national and international progress on circular economy:

Lisa McLean delivered the news of Australia's successful bid to host the second Asia Pacific Circular Economy Hotspot in Sydney next year. There is hope that the event will take place before COP31, which may also be held in Australia. Lisa also highlighted the launch of the [Circular Economy Finance Report and Guide Circular Economy for Investors & Lenders Report](#), which details the circularity of the future of finance, and includes heat maps demonstrating companies and sectors at risk in the linear economy.



Circular economy case studies in the Illawarra:

Cherie Sammut from BlueScope presented on recycling initiatives in collaboration with Veolia. BlueScope's onsite recycling centres collect a variety of recyclables including E-waste, aerosol cans, hard hats, safety glasses, food organics and timber pallets. The centres have received 13 tons of E-waste and 274 tons of timber pallets. BlueScope has also engaged Flagstaff Group to process a number of items for either recycling or reuse onsite.

Reece Conley from Moduplay emphasised a focus on closed-loop manufacturing, local supply chains and a strong commitment to transparency and sustainability. Moduplay's Replay Range is made from 100% post-industrial high-density polyethylene (HDPE) and is fully recyclable at the end of serviceable life.

Report back on project proposals:

High priority projects raised in earlier meetings have been included in a grant application to the NSW EPA led by ISJO. It includes materials mapping, research on behavioural interventions, pilot circular hubs and a digital knowledge hub. The aim is to build a circular economy roadmap for the Illawarra region.

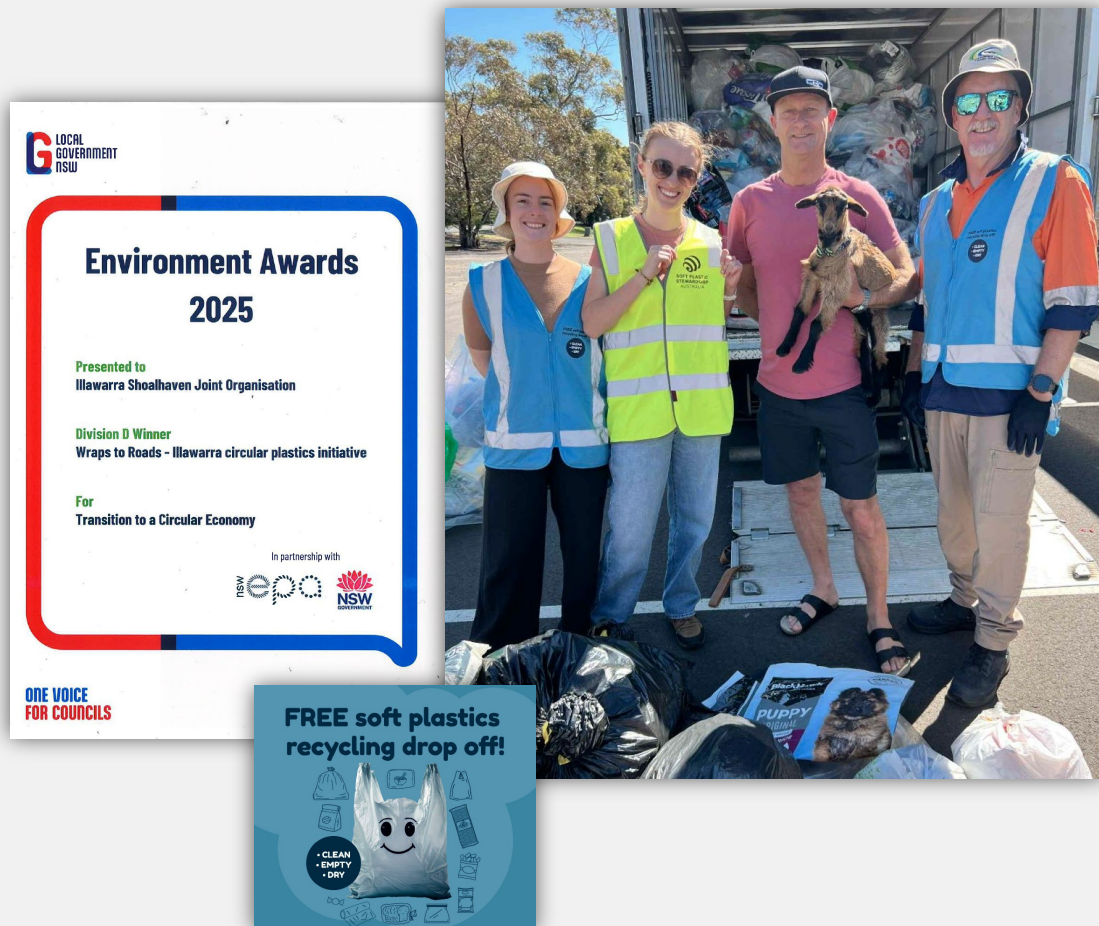
Industry Spotlights:

Attendees were invited to share updates on good practices. There were nine impromptu presentations which focused on circular economy, including the development of a circular economy assessment, sustainable processes for decommissioning renewable energy, social enterprise, upcoming circular economy workshops and updates on new local recycling capacities. ISJO's recent soft plastic drop off events – see our next article – were also featured.

Next Steps:

1. The next meeting is tentatively planned for March 2026 with a focus on organics and the EPA 2030 FOGO mandate.
2. The aim is to continue to grow the Taskforce network to gain more momentum and support from government. Attendees were encouraged to share potential future speakers and collaborators.

Community collects 1.88 tonnes of Soft Plastics as National Momentum builds



Following our region's successful soft-plastic collection pilot in late 2024 and early 2025, three further drop-off events were held between September and November this year across Shellharbour City Council, Wollongong City Council and Kiama Municipal Council. Community interest remained strong, reinforcing how eager residents are for practical ways to keep soft plastics out of landfill.

How much was collected

Across the three events, residents returned 1,880 kg of soft plastics. Despite having fewer events than the earlier seven-event pilot, this total represented 78% of the previous collection volume – showing a clear increase in awareness and demand.

Where the materials are going

Local social-enterprise Flagstaff Group has baled all of the collected material and will assist with transporting it to iQRenew, which operates Australia's first purpose-built post-consumer soft-plastics processing plant in Taree, NSW. The Soft Plastics Engineered Commodity (SPEC) facility converts soft plastics into shred, flake and pelletised materials that can be used in manufacturing new products, supporting a circular approach.

Support from SPSA

This collection round was supported by Soft Plastics Stewardship Australia (SPSA). SPSA is an independent, not-for-profit product stewardship organisation working to rebuild Australia's soft-plastics recycling system.

In November 2025 the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) granted SPSA an eight-year authorisation to operate a national, industry-led soft-plastics recycling scheme.

The authorisation allows SPSA to:

- Introduce a proposed levy starting at \$160 per tonne on participating brand owners and retailers
- Provide long-term stability to attract investment and expand processing infrastructure
- Operate under conditions that require transparent reporting and avoid exclusive processing arrangements, keeping the market competitive

This marks a significant step toward restoring reliable soft-plastics recycling across the country.

What the community told us

A survey by Circular Plastics Illawarra showed that most participants found sorting and dropping off their soft plastics straightforward. Many asked for more frequent opportunities, reflecting strong public appetite for solutions. Suggestions ranged from permanent drop-off points to clearer guidance on what counts as a soft plastic – highlighting both enthusiasm and the need for ongoing education.

Challenges at the events

As with most soft-plastic initiatives, contamination remained a challenge. Common problem items included fruit punnets, biscuit-tray inserts, meat trays, biodegradable bags and various foams – all **not** classified as soft plastics. Some items were also not clean, dry or empty. Staff and volunteers removed contaminants where possible and provided guidance directly to participants.

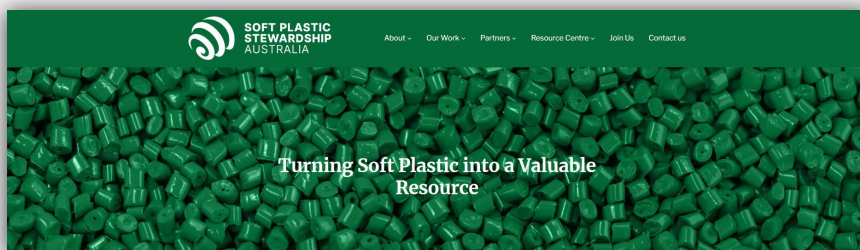
New recycling options now available

Residents now have more ways to recycle soft plastics:

- **Flagstaff Group** is accepting post-consumer soft plastics from the public at designated times each week <https://www.flagstaffgroup.com.au/services/paper-to-paper/>
- **ALL Woolworths stores** in NSW have reintroduced soft-plastic drop-off points.

Looking ahead

Collecting nearly two tonnes of soft plastics in just three events demonstrates how strongly our communities want to participate in a better system. Coupled with SPSA's newly authorised national scheme and the return of more drop-off options, the future for soft-plastics recovery is being powered by committed residents and strengthened by industry collaboration.



Supporting Councils to deliver Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure

In 2025, as part of the Joint Organisation Net Zero Acceleration (JONZA) program, the ISJO in collaboration with the eight Joint Organisations undertaking the JONZA program partnered with the [Astrolabe Group](#) to develop a practical guidance framework for councils delivering Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure (EVCI) on public land.

Funded by the NSW Government Net Zero Transport Team, this initiative supports councils in progressing toward net zero emissions by providing guidance for development of dedicated EVCI policies enabling councils to advocate for an increased uptake of zero-emissions transport.

The project was in response to a key challenge identified by regional councils, that inconsistent internal processes and varying levels of capacity to deliver EVCI effectively have led to barriers that can prohibit further EVCI deployment across council managed public land.

To address this, Astrolabe conducted desktop research and stakeholder engagement to understand current practices, identify policy gaps, and explore leading practices other councils have employed to deliver EVCI on public lands to inform the development of the Local Government guidelines.

The resulting guidance framework includes a suite of information designed to help councils

- Identify suitable public land for EVCI deployment
- Develop EVCI policies or enhance existing policy frameworks
- Navigate internal approval processes for effective delivery of EVCI
- Engage with Charge Point Operators (CPOs) and electricity networks
- Deliver infrastructure that meets community expectations and regional net zero goals

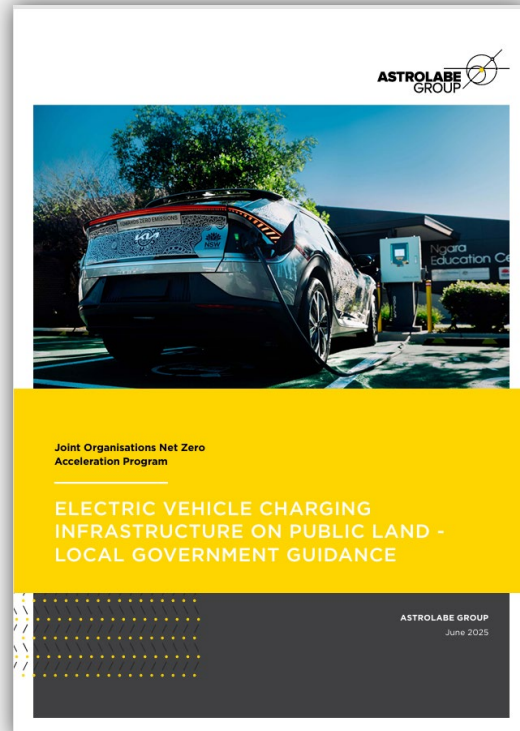
The guidance framework was designed to be adaptable for different council contexts and accounts for varying levels of EVCI experience and exposure, resource capacity and policy maturity.

The resource is intended for any council staff involved in managing the decision-making process regarding EVCI installations on public land including business units such as planning, infrastructure, sustainability, and economic development.

To access a full copy of our **EVCI on Public Land – Local Government Guidance** please click [here](#).

The ISJO also produced resource documents to assist Councils in facilitating the rollout of EVCI.

These resource documents can be accessed by clicking on the following image:





Major milestone for ISJO Community Renewables Program



Attendees across the four ISJO Community Renewables Program live events held during September. From top left; The Sage Hotel Wollongong, The Pavillion Kiama, Shellharbour City Council Auditorium, Shoalhaven Entertainment Centre.

Since launching in June 2025 the ISJO Community Renewables Program (CRP) achieved a key milestone by successfully hosting a series of live community events across the ISJO region.

Held over four consecutive Wednesday evenings through September, each event brought together local residents, council representatives and renewable energy experts for informative sessions designed to

deliver renewable energy education and provide the opportunity for residents to learn more about the Program offering. The first event of the tour was held at the Shellharbour City Council auditorium, followed by Wollongong's event hosted at The Sage Hotel, then Kiama at The Pavilion with the event schedule concluding at the Shoalhaven Entertainment Centre.

Promoted through council communication channels, the events attracted strong community interest, with attendees eager to register to learn more about how they can participate in the Program and start to realise the benefits of adopting to clean energy technology.

The events were opened by the respective Council Mayors or Councillors, which provided the opportunity to also highlight the commitment of our region to a sustainable, low-emissions future.

The attention then shifted to ShineHub, the Program's delivery partner, who provided an engaging and informative presentation to audience members providing details on the exclusive bulk-buy offer available through the CRP and describing how solar and battery systems work to help reduce household energy bills, reduce emissions and support the local electricity grid.

Approximately 270 residents attended the four community events, with an addition of over 300 views of the online recorded presentations. Attendees' tickets were checked at the door however actual numbers appeared to be higher in the rooms due to walk-ins and additional family members on the night coming along on the night.

Feedback from attendees was overwhelmingly positive with many residents already signing up for solar and battery installations through the Program. This strong community response reflects the growing interest in renewable energy and the desire to take meaningful climate action at the household and community level.

For more information or to watch the recorded sessions, visit the ISJO Community Renewables webpage [Illawarra Shoalhaven Community Program](#).

The ISJO Showcases Community Renewables Success at Net Zero Summit



ISJO Net Zero Program Manager, Pat Whitford, presenting to the summit on the benefits of regional collaboration and highlighting the success of the Community Renewables Program

Building on the momentum of the Community Renewables Program's successful live events, the ISJO recently featured at the Local Government Net Zero and Resilient Communities Summit, hosted by the sustainability-focused online publication *The Fifth Estate*.

Held in Sydney on September 10, the Summit brought together professionals from Local and State government, academia, consulting and the broader sustainability industry to share insights and showcase impactful sustainability initiatives. The event provided a platform for the ISJO to highlight its collaborative approach to regional climate action.

The ISJO's Net Zero Program Manager presented on the benefits of the Joint Organisation model, demonstrating how regional collaboration with member councils enabled through programs like JONZA can establish successful regional initiatives such as the Community Renewables Program. The presentation was well received, sparking interest from other councils in the room who were interested in learning how they could replicate the ISJO approach and early success.

The summit highlighted innovation by local government within the sustainability space but also reinforced the importance of partnerships in driving local climate resilience and emissions reduction. The ISJO's work stood out as a practical example of how councils can work together to deliver tangible outcomes for their communities.

To read the full articles and coverage of the event by *The Fifth Estate*, visit the Fifth Estate website:

[On how councils are doing it for themselves | News from the Front Desk | The Fifth Estate](#)
[When it comes to regional communities and the net zero transition there's a need for relentless consultation | TFE Events | The Fifth Estate](#)



From Prevention to Action: ISJO Shares Regional Insights on tackling Illegal Dumping

Illegal dumping continues to present significant environmental, financial and operational challenges for councils across NSW and Australia. This issue took centre stage at a recent panel discussion titled "From Prevention to Action – Tackling Illegal Dumping and Council-Led Solution," where representatives from the City of Whittlesea, Hunter Joint Organisation, Canterbury-Bankstown Council and the Illawarra Shoalhaven Joint Organisation explored smarter, prevention-led responses.

Representing the ISJO our Regional Illegal Dumping Program Manager, James Vincent, shared regional insights that strongly aligned with broader industry conversations occurring at forums such as Waste Expo Australia and the upcoming ecologiQ Greener Infrastructure Conference 2025 where innovation, collaboration and sustainable infrastructure remain core themes.

James highlighted that illegal dumping is a cross-boundary issue requiring councils to work collectively rather than independently. Through shared resources, intelligence and enforcement capability, ISJO councils are able to achieve a level of coverage and consistency that would be impossible on their own. Shared surveillance assets, joint RID enforcement officers and coordinated hotspot monitoring have strengthened deterrence across the region.

James emphasised that this model allows for more strategic, data-informed interventions and ensures consistent messaging for communities that regularly move between council areas.

This regional approach mirrors the national direction showcased at Waste Expo Australia, where collaboration and technology integration continue to underpin the future of waste and resource management.

Workshop on response to illegal dumping of Asbestos



Image courtesy of LGNSW

Local Government NSW (LGNSW) and Wingecarribee Shire Council hosted in 2025 a workshop that focused on council responses to illegal asbestos removal and other asbestos-related incidents at residential properties. The event was delivered as part of the LGNSW Asbestos Policy Project funded by the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA). It involved contributions from a range of stakeholders, including SafeWork NSW, Cumberland City Council, the Illawarra Shoalhaven Joint Organisation (ISJO) and the Southern Region Illegal Dumping Program member councils.

The workshop was held in Moss Vale and was designed to provide council officers with a practical understanding of the regulatory, operational, and inter-agency dimensions of managing asbestos-related risks. The timing of the event aligned with regional concerns around a continued rise in illegal dumping activity involving asbestos-containing materials (ACMs).

Data presented by the ISJO's Regional Illegal Dumping Program Manager, James Vincent, showed that between 2020 and 2025 a total of 301 illegal dumping incidents were recorded across southeastern NSW with 207 (approximately 69%) involving asbestos. Councils most affected included Shoalhaven,

Wollondilly, Wingecarribee and Wollongong where rural land and bush tracks were commonly used for unregulated disposal.

Participants were given an overview of the legal framework relevant to asbestos response, particularly the roles and powers available under the Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997 (POEO Act). Presentations from the NSW EPA and SafeWork NSW clarified council responsibilities in issuing clean-up notices, conducting site inspections, and collaborating with state agencies when incidents involved unsafe handling, transport, or disposal.

The agenda included a series of scenario-based sessions to illustrate typical incidents that councils encounter. One session focused on a case study from Cumberland City Council where officers had responded to unlicensed asbestos removal in a residential neighbourhood. The case highlighted key points of intervention, from initial notification and risk assessment to enforcement action and site remediation. Participants worked through these scenarios in groups, discussing appropriate regulatory responses and sharing experience from their own jurisdictions.

A key focus of the workshop was improving the coordination of multi-agency responses. Discussions covered the interplay between local councils, the EPA, and SafeWork, especially in situations where asbestos is discovered on public or private land without clear ownership or responsibility. Attendees were also briefed on updates to the EPA's "Powers and Notices" guideline, including appropriate use of statutory powers such as prevention notices, orders to provide information and records, and verbal directions to remove waste.

The ISJO participates in world first eDNA research



NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) weed researchers, Dr Karen Bell and Dr Xiaocheng Zhu with ISJO's Chief Weeds Officer, David Pomery, collecting Amazon Frogbit eDNA samples near Wollongong

Weed biosecurity officers from NSW, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia will soon take advantage of the latest environmental DNA (eDNA) techniques to detect the aquatic weed, Amazon Frogbit (*Limnobium laevigatum*) thanks to innovative work by the NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development being trialled in our region.

This work – using eDNA samples they took from NSW waterways to develop the world's first laboratory assays for frogbit DNA – can help detect unseen or hidden frogbit plants in waterways, allowing weed management teams to target unwanted weeds and eradicate new incursions before they infest our environment and farmland," Amazon Frogbit is a floating freshwater plant from Central and South America. It can rapidly invade and smother waterways and is a serious biosecurity threat in the Illawarra Shoalhaven. Further information on it can be found [here](#) including a video of the plant [here](#).

Sniffing out a problem



The Illawarra Shoalhaven Joint Organisations Biosecurity program, under the auspices of the Illawarra District Weeds Authority (IDWA), worked in March 2025 with scent detection dogs, Connor and Dash, to search for the invasive *Parthenium* weed on a rural property at Broughton Village near Gerringong.

First detected on this property in December 2020, the Illawarra District Weeds Authority has been inspecting and controlling the property monthly since then to ensure eradication is achieved. *Parthenium* weed (*Parthenium hysterophorus*) spreads rapidly, is dangerous to grazing animals and reduces crop and land values. Contact with the plant or pollen can cause serious allergic reactions in people and it is listed as Prohibited matter in NSW under the Biosecurity Act 2015.

Detection dogs play an important role in sniffing out newly germinated weeds which are difficult to find in dense undergrowth and could be easily missed by people. In many respects it is like trying to find a needle in a haystack, especially in densely vegetated areas, and the dogs assist in narrowing the areas down that need to be focused on.

The IDWA with support funding from the NSW Department of Primary Industries contracted Connor and Dash, English springer spaniels with proven ability in finding very small seedlings.

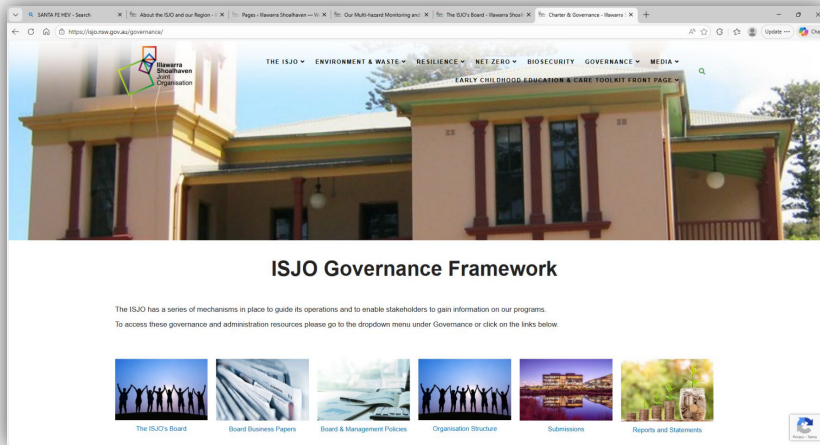
Working with the dogs' handler, IDWA weeds biosecurity officers conducted surveillance throughout the infestation area on the property at Broughton Village. This site will be monitored every four weeks for up to ten years to ensure the seed bank is exhausted and *parthenium* weed is eradicated. With the help of Connor and Dash two semi mature *Parthenium* weed plants were found, the first detection of these plants at the site since April 2024. Once the dogs detect the weed, IDWA staff record the location, manually remove and bag the plant and then continue to closely monitor that location.

The scent detection dogs initiative is now embedded and joins the use of drones and other measures as key components of our regional weeds management strategy.

New ISJO website launched

The ISJO in 2025 launched a new, attractive and easily navigated website to provide enhanced access for our Member Councils, wider stakeholders and the general public to a comprehensive range of information on our organisation, its programs and resources.

The website was developed internally and at no cost.



Please click on one of the images below to see a sample of our webpages.

