

17 REPORTS FOR INFORMATION**17.1 Councillor attendance at conference: LGNSW Visitor Economy Conference 2026 report**Responsible Director: Strategies and Communities

Item 17.1

Report

Conference: LGNSW Destination and Visitor Economy Conference 2026
 Location: Maitland Town Hall, NSW
 Attendance: Cr Matt Brown, Cr Yasmin Tatri, Manager of Tourism and Economic Development, Sally Bursell
 Date of conference: 27 to 29 May 2026

Value of conference

The LGNSW Destination and Visitor Economy Conference brought together councillors, council officers and tourism industry leaders from across New South Wales to discuss the future of the visitor economy, destination management, tourism development and the role of local government in driving economic growth through tourism. The conference included keynote presentations, workshops, panel discussions and site visits focused on practical approaches to strengthening local visitor economies.

In addition to attending the conference, the delegation undertook meetings and site investigations in Port Stephens, including Nelson Bay and Shoal Bay, to better understand the operation of paid parking, destination marketing governance and visitor servicing models.

Key messages/highlights

During this conference, Kiama was awarded Top Tourism Town for the third year running – a huge highlight of the trip.

The conference itself had a theme centered on the critical role councils play in supporting tourism growth, destination development, placemaking, infrastructure planning and community resilience. Key discussion areas included:

- Visitor economy trends and opportunities.
- Destination marketing and global tourism promotion.
- Tourism's role in economic development and community resilience.
- Use of council-owned assets for visitor experiences.
- Infrastructure and transport opportunities, including airport infrastructure.

A recurring message throughout the conference was that councils remain central to visitor economy development through planning, infrastructure provision, place activation, business enablement and destination stewardship. Destination NSW CEO Karen Jones highlighted the importance of local government in delivering the NSW

Reports for Information

17.1 Councillor attendance at conference: LGNSW Visitor Economy Conference 2026 report (cont)

Visitor Economy Strategy and creating authentic visitor experiences that reflect community identity.

Benefits to Kiama Municipal Council

A number of key learnings were had:

1. The Importance of Tourism as an Economic Development Tool

Presentations reinforced that tourism is not solely a marketing function but a significant economic development driver that supports:

- Local employment.
- Small business growth.
- Investment attraction.
- Regional infrastructure development.
- Community vibrancy and resilience.

Councils were encouraged to position tourism within broader economic development strategies and to focus on developing experiences and products that increase visitor expenditure and length of stay.

2. Destination Management Requires Cross-Council Leadership

A key message was that destination success relies on collaboration across council functions, including:

- Strategic planning.
- Infrastructure delivery.
- Parking and transport management.
- Events & economic development.
- Visitor services.

Several case studies demonstrated how successful destinations integrate tourism objectives into broader council planning and investment decisions.

3. Visitor Infrastructure Must Support Growth

A number of sessions explored the need for councils to balance visitor growth with infrastructure pressures. Topics included:

- Transport access.
- Parking management.
- Use of public assets.
- Sustainable funding models for tourism infrastructure

These discussions were particularly relevant to Kiama given ongoing pressures associated with visitation levels and seasonal demand as we complete our Visitor Economy Strategy 2035 (now endorsed).

As part of the conference program, Councillors and staff attended site visits to:

Reports for Information

17.1 Councillor attendance at conference: LGNSW Visitor Economy Conference 2026 report (cont)

1. Phoenix Park Farm, Tocal Agricultural College and Farm Tours, Tranquil Vale Vineyard on an agritourism excursion.
2. Maitland Art Trail, Maitland Regional Sportsground and Athletics Centre, Maitland Regional Art Gallery to consider arts, culture and placemaking
3. Morpeth to Walka Shared Pathway, Morpeth Heritage Walk, Uaine Candles and Boydell's Cellar Door and Restaurant on a heritage experience tour.

Item 17.1**Suggestions for future action****Overall rating**

Scoring: 6 - although the topics discussed at the conference were relevant, the level of innovation was relatively low, with many presentations reinforcing existing knowledge and industry practices rather than introducing new approaches or ideas.

Communication/Community engagement

Networking is a key outcome with conferences such as this one. No specific communication or community engagement took place, other than to promote Kiama's NSW Top Tourism Town Award for the third year.

Risk implication

Nil

Enclosures

- 1 LGNSW Destination and Visitor Economy Conference Program 2026 [⇒](#)
- 2 Port Stephens site visit - paid parking review [⇒](#)