

SUSTAINABILITY OF ENERGY SUPPLY AND RESOURCES IN NSW

Organisation: Shoalhaven City Council

Date Received: 13 September 2019

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Council Reference: 56964E (D19/299221)

Inquiry into sustainability of energy supply and resources in NSW

Submission from Shoalhaven City Council to the NSW Legislative Assembly – Committee on Environment and Planning

Background

On the 16 July 2019, the NSW Legislative Assembly Committee on Environment and Planning commenced an inquiry into the sustainability of energy supply and resources in NSW. The inquiry is looking at the capacity and economic opportunities of renewable energy. It will also cover trends in energy supply and exports, including investment and other financial arrangements, and effects on regional communities, water security, the environment and public health. The Committee will also consider options to support sustainable economic development in communities affected by changing energy and resource markets, including the role of government policies. The Terms of Reference for the inquiry are as follows:

1. The capacity and economic opportunities of renewable energy.
2. Emerging trends in energy supply and exports, including investment and other financial arrangements.
3. The status of and forecasts for energy and resource markets.
4. Effects on regional communities, water security, the environment and public health.
5. Opportunities to support sustainable economic development in regional and other communities likely to be affected by changing energy and resource markets, including the role of government policies.
6. Any other related matters.

Introduction

Shoalhaven City Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the NSW Legislative Assembly 'Inquiry into sustainability of energy supply and resources in NSW'. As a large, regional NSW Council operating its own water and wastewater infrastructure, Shoalhaven Council is exposed to high operational energy costs whilst simultaneously striving to curb carbon emissions and maintain affordable rates for ratepayers. This is the true 'triple bottom line' of sustainability, considering environmental, economic and social factors in our decision-making on energy supply. The 'business as usual' approach towards energy management in local government is no longer a sustainable model. Sourcing fossil-fuel based electricity and gas at exorbitant prices whilst generating excessive greenhouse gas emissions goes against the grain of sustainability and community expectations. Local Councils such as Shoalhaven, will need to rely on

the NSW Government to support its transition to a more sustainable energy supply in the future. There has been some limited support recently from the NSW Government to regional Councils and communities in this sector, but more will be needed to achieve future corporate and community energy and emissions targets.

Shoalhaven City Council is working towards achieving its vision, objectives and targets in its recently adopted [Sustainable Energy Policy](#) (*Attachment 1*). The Policy aims to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy (consistent with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal No. 7), for both its operations and that of the wider Shoalhaven community. The increased use of renewable energy and improved energy efficiency is crucial to creating more sustainable communities, employment opportunities and resilience to climate change. Council is aiming to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 (consistent with the United Nations Paris Agreement ratified by the Commonwealth Government and the NSW Government's agreed targets). Interim targets to reduce emissions are 25% by 2025 and 50% by 2030, compared to 2015 levels. Council will also seek opportunities to source or generate electricity supply for Council's operations from renewable energy sources, with an interim target of 25% renewables by 2023 and eventually 50% from renewable sources by 2030. ***A salient point here is that Shoalhaven Council is mirroring the NSW Government's carbon emissions target of net-zero emissions by 2050 and that any recommendations from this Parliamentary Inquiry into the sustainability of energy supply should strive towards achieving this target and lowering carbon emissions.***

Implementation of Council's Sustainable Energy Policy has already commenced with numerous energy projects recently completed or commenced in the past 12 months, including:

- Installation of a 25 kW and 22.5 kW solar photovoltaic (PV) system (i.e. solar panels) at Bamarang Water Treatment Plant and Berry Wastewater Treatment Plant, respectively. A 20 kWh storage battery was also installed at the Berry plant to trial how batteries can be integrated into existing wastewater treatment systems to assist with the intermittent loads from batch processes and attempt to avoid excessive peak demand charges;
- Approval and procurement of an 81 kW solar PV system for the rooftop of the Shoalhaven Entertainment Centre (due for installation in Oct 2019). This project will take Shoalhaven Council's total solar PV installs to 328 kW;
- Adoption of the '[Electric Vehicle \(EV\) Charging Stations on Public Land](#)' policy;
- Inclusion of three (3) fully electric Hyundai Kona cars in Council's fleet as part of a trial of EVs and charging infrastructure;
- Creation of an internal Revolving Energy Fund (REFund) with seed funding to finance energy efficiency and renewable energy projects into the future. The savings in energy charges as a result of the project will be deposited into the REFund to replenish it for future project funding;
- Replacement of 4,231 residential street lights with energy savings LED lamps. This project was part-funded by the then NSW Office of Environment & Heritage allowing Council to achieve a feasible payback period of <5 years;

- Partnering with a range of stakeholders, including Repower Shoalhaven (a local community energy group), on the [Social Access Solar Garden feasibility study](#). The Social Access Solar Gardens project was made possible with funding support from ARENA and the NSW Government, as well as a number of project partner organisations, including Shoalhaven City Council. This project is now being further progressed by Repower Shoalhaven to establish a 4 MW community-owned solar farm in the Shoalhaven;
- Membership in the national Cities Power Partnership (CPP) program (around 110 member Councils in total) to implement five climate change pledges made by Council. Shoalhaven Council recently received a 'Highly Commended' for its 'Charging Ahead with Renewables' project entered into the 2019 CPP national awards in the Renewable Energy Achievement category;
- Membership in the NSW Government's Sustainability Advantage Program and working towards a Sustainability Policy and Strategy.

Response to the terms of reference

In this section, Shoalhaven City Council addresses the terms of reference.

1. The capacity and economic opportunities of renewable energy.

Regional NSW offers a prime opportunity for the development of solar and wind farms to power Council's future renewable energy demands. With consistent electricity requirements year on year, NSW Councils are well placed to either own or 'buy into' these renewable energy installations. In recent years, a number of NSW Councils have already ventured into utility-scale solar farms for their electricity needs including:

- City of Newcastle secured a \$7M loan from the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC) to construct a 5 MW solar farm at the Summerhill Waste Management Centre;
- The Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (SSROC) signed a landmark agreement on behalf of 18 Councils for a renewable energy Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) for up to 35% of their retail electricity being supplied by the Moree Solar Farm until 2030.

Small-scale solar PV installations on Council assets (roof mounted or ground mounted) up to 100 kW capacity are being rolled out across NSW Councils, including Shoalhaven City, as funds allow. Commercial solar PV installations are now more affordable than ever and continue to edge towards cost parity with grid-supplied electricity (fossil-fuel derived). With 25 year product warranties on quality solar PV panels these 'behind-the-meter' installations offer long-term economic benefits to Councils. Much of the affordability of solar PV systems today lies in the current availability of Small-Scale Technology Certificates under the Federal Government's Small-scale Renewable Energy Scheme (due to end 2030). Typically offered as a 'point of sale' discount from solar installers, these Renewable Energy Certificates (or RECs) can account for around one-third of the cost of the installed system. These types of Government rebates are considered essential in fast-tracking solar PV installations for Councils, businesses and the community, and must be part of a renewable energy future. A number of

Shoalhaven clubs have invested in large-scale solar PV installations including the Bomaderry Bowling Club which installed a 200 kW system on its rooftop in 2018. Smaller community clubs, such as surf lifesaving clubs, as well as small businesses, have also installed solar panels to assist them keep power prices down. Shoalhaven City Councillors are hearing from local small business owners that they would like to install solar PV to reduce their running costs and invest these savings into more staff and business improvements. Council is of the opinion that the NSW Government could do more to encourage small businesses, the community and particularly low income earners, by offering greater financial incentives and/or subsidies for them to afford solar PV and storage battery installations. Addressing how people renting, rather than owning homes, can benefit from solar PV and storage batteries, is also a big challenge for all levels of government. This sub-group can find themselves 'locked out' of the renewables energy market as they cannot fix solar panels to their rental properties.

2. Emerging trends in energy supply and exports, including investment and other financial arrangements.

Commercial/Council Solar Feed-in Tariffs

Until storage batteries become more affordable, higher solar PV feed-in tariffs are needed for commercial businesses and local Councils to gain monetary value from their solar exports to the grid. Most weekly energy load profiles of commercial premises show that they use the majority of their power from Monday to Friday only. Their solar systems are therefore generating excess electricity over the weekends and exporting this back to the grid. Commercial feed-in tariffs from retailers are currently very minimal (often below 10 c/kWh) which does not support the financial business case and payback periods. A higher solar feed-in tariff (although not an unsustainable 60 c/kWh gross feed-in tariff previously available in NSW) for commercial businesses and local Councils would accelerate the uptake of commercial solar PV.

Solar PPA Vendor Panel

In 2018, Local Government Procurement & the NSW OEH launched the Solar PPA Vendor Panel which is a pre-qualified panel for procuring energy service providers to deliver solar power purchase agreements (Solar PPA) for rooftop solar installations. Although available to NSW Councils, Solar PPAs do not represent an economically viable option for securing renewable energy. The comparative finance rate for a Solar PPA is >5%, whereas Council can secure Government finance loans below 4%. It is therefore far better for a Council to borrow capital funds and install their own solar PV system rather than secure them via a Solar PPA for 10 or more years. The success of the LGP/OEH Vendor Panel for Solar PPAs is therefore questionable and efforts could probably be redirected into other funding mechanisms to assist Councils with solar PV installs.

3. The status of and forecasts for energy and resource markets.

Nil response

4. Effects on regional communities, water security, the environment and public health.

Community Renewable Energy projects

Not-for-profit Community Energy 4 Goulburn has progressed a 1.8 MW community solar farm by entering into a contract with Australian company Komo Energy to build the solar farm. Given that this project was first discussed back in 2013, had a feasibility study completed in 2016, and is now only due for construction in 2020, the timeframes are excessively long to get community solar farms off the ground. Our local community energy group, Repower Shoalhaven, has also faced many administrative and financial hurdles in progressing a 4 MW local solar farm that was found to be both viable and feasible under the Social Access Solar Garden feasibility research study. Generation of utility-scale renewable energy by regional communities should be encouraged and fast-tracked as much as possible. Shoalhaven Council calls upon the NSW Government to review and streamline the planning approval process, increase grant funding opportunities and provide further support to community renewable energy projects in the future. Council is aware of the recent NSW Government's Regional Community Energy Fund program that provides financial assistance to community energy projects and is fully supportive of this program being continued.

5. Opportunities to support sustainable economic development in regional and other communities likely to be affected by changing energy and resource markets, including the role of government policies.

NSW Climate Change Fund

The NSW Climate Change Fund, investing \$1.4 billion between 2017 and 2022, advertises a lot of various programs and available funding but fails to evaluate if they are providing effective outcomes. The '[Evaluation of programs](#)' web page, last updated 28 November 2018, publicly displays only four reports - none of which are targeting the larger funding programs. Some more public visibility of the expenditure of the NSW Climate Change Fund programs and their effectiveness would be welcomed.

Local Industry – Energy Market

A local Shoalhaven example of where energy security and pricing can adversely affect local industry is at Manildra's Shoalhaven Starches Plant at Bomaderry. Manildra is converting their Shoalhaven flour mill from gas to old fashioned coal boilers, as this was forecast as a more economical and viable fuel for the plant. The poor quality 'nut coal' fuel is to be sourced from a reopened Blue Mountains coal mine. The carbon footprint of coal mining in the Blue Mountains, train transport to Nowra and the subsequent combustion of the poor quality coal, is huge compared to the fuel alternatives of natural gas or better still renewable energy. If regional industries are to better utilise renewable energy for their clean energy needs, the NSW Government would be expected to provide financial incentives to assist them choose renewables over more polluting fossil-fuels.

Special Charge Scheme – residential solar panels

In January 2019, the Shoalhaven Mayor, Amanda Findley, wrote to the NSW Premier, the Hon. Gladys Berejiklian MP, seeking amendments to NSW legislation to allow a Solar Savers Program in NSW (*Attachment 2*). In 2014, Darebin City Council in Victoria established that a Special Charge Scheme (SCS) could be used to install solar photovoltaic (PV) systems on ratepayers' homes. Darebin Council offered the service to low-income households who repay the cost of the system over 10 years – interest free. This was the first time in Australia a local government has used a SCS for an environmental program – specifically to install solar PV systems. Darebin Solar \$aver program was delivered again in 2015-17 and the scheme expanded for 2017-2019 with an estimated 2,000 participants benefiting from the \$10M program. Darebin Council facilitates access to suppliers and installers, quality solar panels and inverters and extended warranties through the establishment of a tender panel.

According to Section 163 of the Victorian *Local Government Act 1989*, Councils can establish a Special Charge Scheme (SCS) to recover the costs associated with works or programs. Typically, Councils would introduce a SCS for an infrastructure project, such as drainage or footpaths. In NSW, the establishment of a Special Charge Scheme **is not available** under the provisions of the NSW *Local Government Act 1993*. There are no similar mechanisms under the NSW LGA 1993 to enable a similar program of repayments via rates notices.

Shoalhaven City Council is keen to support the uptake of solar power across the Shoalhaven LGA, particularly for pensioners and low income families. Indeed, one of Shoalhaven Council's Sustainable Energy Policy targets is to 'promote relevant initiatives to the community and businesses to increase the uptake of installed rooftop solar panels across the Shoalhaven LGA towards a target of 33% of dwellings by 2025'. Council encourages the NSW Government to consider future legal reforms to the NSW *Local Government Act 1993* to enable repayments via rates notices for worthwhile investments such as residential solar panels.

6. Any other related matters.

Refuse-derived Fuels (RDF)

Shoalhaven Council's household mixed-waste (red lid bins) will soon be processed at the new Resource Recovery Facility (RRF) in West Nowra. This state-of-the-art facility will be Australia's first Advanced Waste Treatment plant capable of diverting over 90% of Mixed Waste from landfill. 25% of the total waste will be segregated into Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF). The 'biomass' or sterilised organic matter (30% of the total) is to be used in the manufacture of brick and as an additive to render, but also has the potential to be used as a Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF) for energy recovery. Although Council itself is not intending to use any of this for energy production there is an opportunity for it to generate power in the future. So over 50% of the segregated waste in the household red lid bins has the potential to be used as a RDF which is a substantial source of sustainable energy on the proviso that any combustion emissions are acceptable. Council is aware of the previous NSW Government inquiry into '[energy from waste](#)' in 2018 and the recommendations stemming from it.

Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Infrastructure

With a greater range and more affordable EV models now becoming available, the availability of EV charging infrastructure remains one of the main deterrents for the uptake of EVs in Australia. 'Range anxiety' limits EV owners travel into regional areas for fear of running out of battery power before finding suitable charging stations.

As an election promise in early 2019, the Berejiklian government pledged \$3 million in the form of a co-investment to fund EV fast chargers on major regional corridors including the Newell, Great Western, New England, Pacific and Princes Highways and the Hume Motorway. Another \$2 million will fund charging points in commuter car parks such as at train stations. The funding forms part of the NSW Government's [Electric and Hybrid Vehicle Plan](#).

NRMA is progressing their own plans with the installation of 40 DC Fast EV Chargers across NSW, including one installed at Berry Bowling Club in the Shoalhaven earlier in 2019. These are DC fast chargers (50kW) so only take up to 1 hour to recharge an EV, as opposed to AC chargers that may take >5 hours to recharge. Tesla have also installed a small number of EV superchargers in regional areas, such as Silos Winery & Restaurant north of Nowra, which are exclusively for Tesla vehicles.

In May 2019, Shoalhaven Council adopted its '[Electric Vehicle \(EV\) Charging Stations on Public Land Policy](#)' (POL18/32) to provide criteria for the provision, installation and management of EV Charging Stations on public land in the Shoalhaven LGA. The Policy outlines the principles for planning EV charging infrastructure to support the uptake of suitable EV chargers at the right location. In early 2019, Council took delivery of 3 Hyundai Kona EVs (fully electric – not hybrids) as part of a two year fleet trial. Part of this trial is to address a strategy for installing charging systems for Council's fleet and/or assets (MIN18.916). Council staff are currently working on some initiatives to progress EV charging infrastructure in line with this resolution. Financial assistance and strategic direction from the NSW Government to 'drive' the uptake of EVs in NSW by establishing an extensive EV charging network (powered by renewable energy) in regional NSW is sought.

Recommendations

Shoalhaven City Council recommends that the State Government of NSW:

1. Increase its financial support and assistance to encourage small businesses, industry, local Government, and the community (particularly low income earners) to invest in renewable energy (specifically solar PV systems and storage batteries) for their future electricity needs.
2. Implement broad reaching measures to achieve the NSW Government's greenhouse gas emissions target of net-zero emissions by 2050. Any recommendations from this Parliamentary Inquiry into the sustainability of energy supply should strive towards achieving this target and lowering carbon emissions to mitigate climate change.
3. Provide an incentivised solar feed-in tariff (though not an unsustainable 60 c/kWh gross feed-in tariff previously available in NSW) for commercial businesses and local Councils to accelerate the uptake of commercial solar PV across the State.
4. Review and streamline the planning approval process, increase grant funding opportunities and provide further support and assistance to community renewable energy projects in the future. Council is aware of the recent NSW Government's Regional Community Energy Fund program that provides financial assistance to community energy projects and is fully supportive of this program being continued.
5. Create more public visibility on the expenditure of the NSW Climate Change Fund programs and their effectiveness.
6. Consider future legal reforms to the *NSW Local Government Act 1993* to enable repayments via rates notices (e.g. Special Charge Scheme used in Victoria) for worthwhile investments such as residential solar panels.
7. Provide financial assistance and strategic direction to 'drive' the uptake of electric vehicles (EVs) in NSW by establishing an extensive EV charging network (powered by renewable energy) across regional NSW.

Attachments

1. Shoalhaven City Council's adopted 'Sustainable Energy Policy'.
2. Letter from Mayor of Shoalhaven City Council to the Premier of NSW, the Hon, Gladys Berejiklian, regarding amendments to the NSW Local Government Act.

Attachment 1 – Shoalhaven City Council's Sustainable Energy Policy



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For more information contact the Shoalhaven Water Group

Sustainable Energy Policy

Policy Number: POL18/44 • Adopted: 28/05/2019 • Minute Number: MIN19.354 • File: 56964E • Produced By: Shoalhaven Water Group • Review Date: 1/12/2020

1. PURPOSE

Shoalhaven City Council ('Council') aims to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy (consistent with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals), for both its operations and that of the wider Shoalhaven community. The increased use of renewable energy and improved energy efficiency is crucial to creating more sustainable communities, employment opportunities and resilience to climate change.

2. STATEMENT

Shoalhaven City Council is committed to operating sustainable assets, facilities and fleet vehicles across the Shoalhaven Local Government Area. The operation of these facilities and fleet transport can consume large amounts of energy at a high cost and generate harmful greenhouse gas emissions. Council will actively work towards reducing fossil-fuelled energy consumption for assets and transport under its control to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and climate change impacts. At all times, Council will seek the most effective and economic means to achieve its emission reduction targets from all sources, including investing in renewable energy generation projects to ensure clean energy for the future. This extends to Council encouraging the Shoalhaven community's transition away from fossil fuels to more renewable energy generation and battery storage for households, businesses and industry.

3. PROVISIONS

3.1. Vision

Shoalhaven City Council's vision is to operate its energy consuming assets and fleet transport in a sustainable manner with minimal effect on the natural environment. This will then serve as a model of best practice for the wider Shoalhaven community to reduce energy bills, minimise greenhouse gas emissions and increase uptake of renewable energy.

3.2. Objectives and Targets

To achieve this Vision, and in partnership with stakeholders and the community, Shoalhaven City Council will:

- Aim to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 (consistent with the United Nations Paris Agreement ratified by the Commonwealth Government and the NSW

Government's agreed targets). Interim targets to reduce emissions are 25% by 2025 and 50% by 2030, compared to 2015 levels.

- Continually improve management practices to strive towards improved energy efficiency across the organisation.
- Seek opportunities to source or generate electricity supply for Council's operations from renewable energy sources, with an interim target of 25% renewables by 2023 and eventually 50% from renewable sources by 2030.
- Promote relevant initiatives to the community and businesses to increase the uptake of installed rooftop solar panels across the Shoalhaven LGA towards a target of 33% of dwellings by 2025.
- Upgrade all street lighting to energy saving LEDs by 2025.

4. IMPLEMENTATION

Shoalhaven City Council will support this Policy by:

- Preparing and implementing a Sustainable Energy Strategy by January 2020 to identify priority actions for improved energy efficiency (including electricity and gas), sustainable fleet transport (including transitioning towards electric vehicles), corporate and community greenhouse gas emissions reduction, renewable energy generation and battery storage.
- Resourcing its implementation by means of sufficient annual budget allocations for the procurement of sustainable energy, energy efficiency and fleet transport initiatives.
- Establishing an internal Revolving Energy Fund (REFund) as a mechanism to generate funds from energy efficiency project savings to support future energy and renewable energy initiatives.
- Measuring, monitoring, benchmarking and reporting on energy consumption to identify issues, tracking towards agreed targets and informing this Policy and the Sustainable Energy Strategy.

5. REVIEW

The Sustainable Energy Policy and associated Sustainable Energy Strategy will be reviewed every 4 years and particularly where new legislation, guidelines and/or management information dictates.

6. APPLICATION OF ECOLOGICALLY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

This Policy will play a key role in the application of ecologically sustainable development (ESD) principles as it aims to reduce reliance on fossil-fuelled grid power, increase renewable energy generation and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Specifically, this Policy supports the following ESD principles:

- The precautionary principle – where there is the threat of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation.

- Intergenerational equity – the current generation should make sure that the health, diversity and productivity of the environment continues for the benefit of future generations.
- Conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity – conserving the diversity of flora and fauna and the health and sustainability of ecosystems.

Attachment 2 - Letter from Shoalhaven Mayor to NSW Premier re: Solar Savers



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Address all correspondence to
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Council Reference: 56964E (D19/23030)
Your Reference:

The Hon. Gladys Berejiklian MP
GPO Box 5341
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Premier

Solar Saver Program – Recommendation to State Government to Amend Legislation

In 2014, Darebin City Council in Victoria established that a Special Charge Scheme (SCS) could be used to install solar photovoltaic (PV) systems on ratepayers' homes. Council offered the service to low-income households who repay the cost of the system over 10 years – interest free. This was the first time in Australia a local government has used a SCS for an environmental program – specifically to install solar PV installation.

Darebin Solar Saver program was trialled in 2013-2015 and delivered again in 2015-17. The scheme has been expanded for 2017-2019 with an estimated 2000 participants benefiting from the \$10M program. Under the program, Council pays the upfront cost for a solar system and the ratepayer pays it off over ten years, interest free. Furthermore, Council facilitates access to suppliers and installers, quality panels and inverters and extended warranties through the establishment of a tender panel.

In 2017, 292 pensioners installed 545 kilowatts (kW) of PV. The average solar system size was 1.87 kW and the average repayment is \$290 per year, whilst it is estimated that the average household will save \$90 - \$120 per year on electricity costs above the rates charge. The Solar Saver program is equivalent to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 3.2 tonnes per year per household. The Solar Saver program is a win-win scenario for pensioners and the environment.

According to Section 163 of the Victorian *Local Government Act 1989*, Councils can establish a SCS to recover the costs associated with works or programs. Typically, Councils would introduce a SCS for an infrastructure project, such as drainage or footpaths. In NSW, the establishment of a Special Charge Scheme **is not available** under the provisions of the NSW *Local Government Act 1993*. There are no similar mechanisms under the NSW LGA 1993 to enable a similar program of repayments via rates notices.

Shoalhaven City Council is keen to support the uptake of solar power across the Shoalhaven LGA, particularly for pensioners and low income families. Council encourages the State Government to consider future legal reforms to the NSW *Local Government Act 1993* to enable repayments via rates notices for worthwhile investments such as residential solar panels.

RESPECT | INTEGRITY | ADAPTABILITY | COLLABORATION

If you need further information about this matter, please contact Darren O'Connell, Shoalhaven Water Group on [REDACTED]. Please quote Council's reference 56964E (D19/23030).

Yours faithfully

Amanda Findley
Mayor
Shoalhaven City Council

25/01/2019

END OF SUBMISSION