



ROUS
COUNTY COUNCIL



Annual Report 2020-21

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Cover page photos:

Blackwater discharging from a drainage system near Coraki in April 2021

St Helena water pipeline installation

Parthenium weed (photo: Phil Blackmore)

(Rous’s Facebook post alerting the community about an outbreak of Parthenium weed was our most popular piece of content for the year).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the Land on which we work and pays respect to them and to Elders, past, present and future.

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COUNCIL MEETINGS

Meetings are held at Rous County Council Administration Office, 218- 232 Molesworth Street, Lismore (Level 4).

A copy of our meeting agenda is available on our website by close of business on the Friday prior to the Council meeting [business papers and meeting minutes rous's](#)

During the reporting period, meetings were also available to view via 'Zoom' link, made available on the morning of the meeting via Council's website: [business papers and meeting minutes](#)

Audio recordings of Council meetings are also available on Council's website.

This Annual Report summarises the activities and performance of Council for 2020/21 against our Delivery program and Operational plan. As well as reporting on our activities, the report contains a range of statutory reporting information. This and earlier Annual Reports are available on our website: www.rous.nsw.gov.au

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CHAIR'S MESSAGE



Successfully providing quality services that support a sustainable and productive Northern Rivers – today and well into the future – means Rous County Council must

continually look to foster stronger ties with the many communities that depend on us.

Despite another year shaped by the challenges and uncertainty of the pandemic, I am pleased to report that throughout 2020/21 Council again strived to work closely with our region's constituent councils, residents, Traditional Custodians, business owners, farmers and others to deliver better flood mitigation, water supply and weed biosecurity outcomes.

Most notably, we ensured that water security became a critical conversation for the four local government areas and 110,000 people who currently rely on our regional supply each day.

Council's draft Future Water Project 2060 was subject to two extensive public exhibition periods during 2020/21, with over 15,000 responses received via written submissions, online surveys and petition signatories (making it the largest response we have received to a single project or issue).

Constant community input is crucial in making sure we pursue a robust water security plan that prioritises innovative water source solutions to overcome the increasing climate and population demands confronting our regional supply without compromising the Northern Rivers' rich environment and cultural heritage.

Helping the community to be waterwise and reduce its water use as part of our Regional Demand Management Plan remained a significant priority over the reporting period as well.

Through the plan's Sustainable Water Partner Program, we continued to support businesses and organisations that are high water users to save water and lower their costs. From universities and high schools through to holiday park providers and manufacturing plants, Council funded the development of water saving plans and provided rebates of up to \$25,000 to implement water conservation projects.

Council also teamed up with the organisation behind the Smart Approved Watermark – Australia's label for products and services that save water. This new partnership has given us access to a broad range of modern, online and interactive tools and other resources (including a home water calculator) that anyone can use to find ways to conserve water indoors, outdoors or at work.

Importantly, I am further pleased to report that we enhanced our on-the-ground collaboration with landowners to tackle flood mitigation issues.

In August 2020, Council re-endorsed a longstanding program whereby volunteer landowners assist with actively managing our network of rural floodgates.

At certain locations, landowners are trained to operate these floodgates, including opening them to enable tidal exchange and improve water quality as well as closing floodgates during flood alerts.

This program continues to help Council build and strengthen its relationships with landowners on the floodplain, which is critical in achieving the objectives of our overall flood mitigation approach.

During the first half of the 2020/21 period, we also commenced an exciting new flood mitigation project to address concerns with the 40-year-old Keith Hall drainage system at South Ballina. Via unique cooperation with 30 landowners and Ballina Shire Council, we are identifying a number of options to improve the drainage system's performance and minimise its effect on surrounding waterways without impacting existing land uses.

Towards the end of 2020, our ongoing battle against the noxious tropical soda apple weed received a much-needed funding boost.

With tropical soda apple known to flourish in fire-affected areas, Council secured a \$250,000 grant from North Coast Local Land Services as part of the NSW Government's Bushfire Recovery stimulus package. The funding gave us the resources to directly assist landowners and property managers whose properties were affected by the most recent bushfires and are vulnerable to the spread of tropical soda apple.

Late in the 2020/21 year, we proudly embarked on a major community engagement initiative by signing a lease with Lismore City Council to reopen the former visitor information centre and operate a cultural, environmental and information facility.

The purpose-built public facility will be used to create a regional base for community engagement across all our service delivery areas as well as partner with the Indigenous community to deliver cultural heritage displays, events and other activities as part of Council's Reconciliation Action Plan. In addition, the facility is to be setup in a way that allows us to support Lismore City Council with its efforts to continue providing tourism and visitor information services.

This lease agreement is a prime example of our commitment to strengthening relationships with each constituent council and local government area that we serve.

As it has been for the previous three years, it was again a privilege to be the Chair of Rous County Council in 2020/21 and work alongside a group of fellow councillors dedicated to doing their best to serve the community. The following annual report sets out Council's achievements over the past financial year, all of which depended on the meaningful and lasting partnerships we forged with the people that call Ballina Shire, Byron Shire, Lismore City, Richmond Valley, Kyogle and Tweed Shire home.

Councillor Keith Williams
Chairperson

GENERAL MANAGER'S MESSAGE



Like most of the Northern Rivers, adapting to remote working, workplace disruptions and public health restrictions became the new normal for Rous County Council across the

2020/21 year.

Thanks to the resilience, dedication and agility of our over 70 staff, we were able to work effectively through another 12 months defined by the pandemic while continuing to provide essential water supply, flood mitigation and weed biosecurity services for the community.

Next to an outstanding team of staff, maintaining the organisation's financial sustainability is crucial in ensuring continuity of operations for our community during times of uncertainty. I am pleased to report Council's financial position remains in sound order despite the challenges of the past year, having posted another solid operating surplus of \$4.3 million for 2020/21.

Effectively managing our large asset base valued at over \$620 million is also a key part of securing the long-term sustainability of Council's service delivery.

Following an extensive asset management improvement project, in August 2020 a new, four-year Asset Management Strategy was put into action. From our floodgates, levees and drainage systems through to our depots, dams, water treatment plants, pump stations and pipelines, this strategy will make sure all our assets remain reliable now as well as ready for the future.

It is especially pleasing to report to our community that Council invested almost \$6 million renewing critical infrastructure in 2020/21.

In particular, significant progress was made on the \$36 million St Helena Water Pipeline Project. After overcoming adverse weather and terrain conditions, the project's first stage was completed – with 4.7 kilometres of new pipeline laid between Dorrroughby and Clunes. Stage two works to construct the final 8.5 kilometres of new pipeline also commenced.

The regional importance of the St Helena Water Pipeline Project cannot be emphasised enough, as it will ensure security of supply can be maintained to our fast-growing coastal areas during periods of high demand for water.

Although Rous County Council itself may be a relatively new organisation, we possess a rich history thanks to the former Far North Coast Weeds, Richmond River County Council and Rous Water organisations. A significant part of that legacy is the Richmond Water Laboratories, which proudly celebrated 20 years of operation in 2021.

The Richmond Water Laboratories continues to be a self-funded, high-performing business unit of Council, providing nationally accredited sampling and testing across the Northern Rivers region for drinking water supplies, private bores, beaches and other recreational waterways, groundwater aquifers, wastewater systems and environmental waters. Their work includes visiting up to 100 sites every week - from Ocean Shores in the north to Evans Head in the south and west to Bonalbo - and conducting hundreds of field tests.

Most importantly, we are striving to develop our organisation's legacy as a community leader.

In April 2021, we took another promising step in our journey of reconciliation with the Traditional Custodians and Indigenous people of the Northern Rivers. Following extensive work by Council's Reconciliation Action Plan Advisory Group and close liaison with Reconciliation Australia, our next Reconciliation Action Plan was officially endorsed.

Building on Council's initial 'Reflect' plan, the new 'Innovate' Reconciliation Action Plan seeks to strengthen our foundational relationships with First Nations people by outlining actions that work towards achieving a unique vision for reconciliation.

I am thrilled to deliver Rous County Council's 2020/21 Annual Report, which captures our achievements, performance and other progress towards strategic objectives for the reporting period. Again, to all our people – the Leadership Team and I are grateful for your tireless efforts in the face of ongoing adversity to serve the many communities counting on us each day.

Phillip Rudd
General Manager



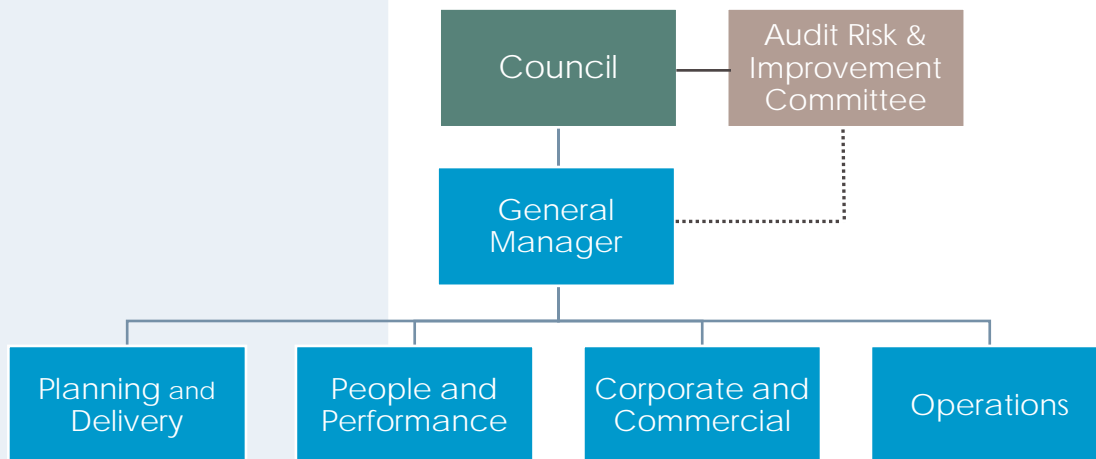
St Helena water pipeline works



Rous and Ballina Council staff monitoring water quality in the floodgate outlet at Keith Hall

COUNCIL STRUCTURE

Operations are arranged across four Groups; each being led by one manager who reports directly to the General Manager.



Our workforce consists of office based and outdoor workers operating across four local government areas: Ballina, Byron, Lismore and Richmond Valley. Weed biosecurity activities extend to a further two local government areas that are serviced under separate fee-for-service arrangements in the Kyogle and Tweed local government areas.

Our Leadership Team

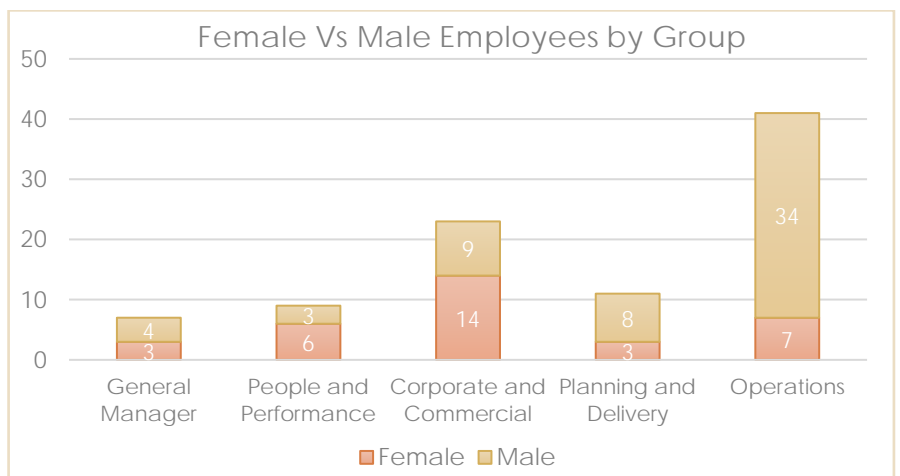
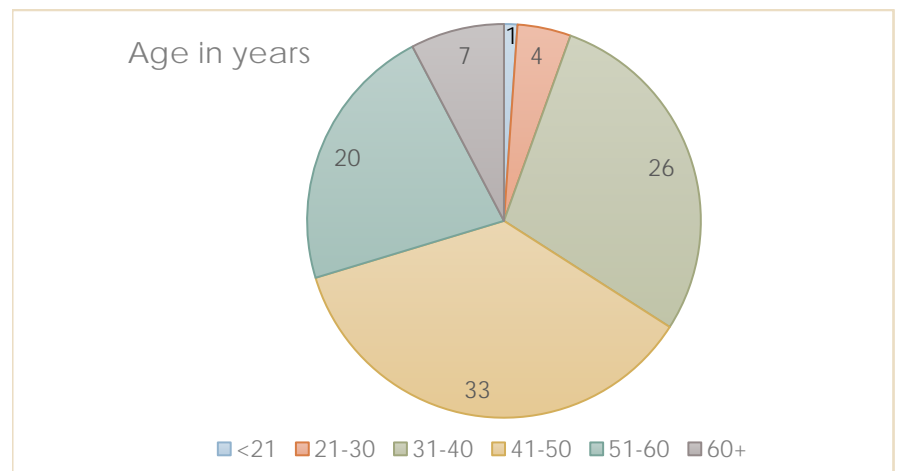
- General Manager: Phillip Rudd
- Group Manager Planning and Delivery: Andrew Logan
- Group Manager People and Performance: Helen McNeil
- Group Manager Corporate and Commercial: Guy Bezrouchko
- Group Manager Operations: Adam Nesbitt



OUR STAFF

AVERAGE AGE BY GROUP	
General Manager	48
Corporate and Commercial	46
People and Performance	46
Operations	44
Planning and Delivery	46
Average age of Rous employees 46	

By Group	Head count	Male	Female
Corporate and Commercial	23	9	14
People and Performance	9	3	6
Planning and Delivery	11	8	3
Operations	41	34	7
General Manager	7	4	3
Total as at 30 June 2021	91	58	33



MISSION, VISION AND VALUES

Mission Vision & Values

OUR MISSION

Partner with our Constituent Councils to provide quality services that support a sustainable and productive region.

OUR VISION

Thrive and evolve as a valued regional service provider.

OUR VALUES

SAFETY

Safety first
24/7



TEAMWORK

> **ONE** team,
one purpose



ACCOUNTABILITY

> **OWN** it,
solve it, achieve it



RESPECT

> **BE** honest,
be fair



OUR COUNCILLORS

The elected Council is made up of eight councillors with two nominated from each of the constituent councils (Ballina, Byron, Lismore and Richmond Valley). Councillors are elected for a 4-year term with the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson being elected each year by the councillors.

Due to the deferral of local government elections in 2020, this term has been five years.

The annual election of Chair and Deputy Chair was held at the 21 October 2020 Council meeting with Cr Keith Williams (Ballina Shire Council) elected Chair and Cr Sharon Cadwallader (Ballina Shire Council) elected Deputy Chair.



Cr Keith Williams
Chair
Ballina Shire Council



Cr Sharon
Cadwallader
Deputy Chair
Ballina Shire Council



Cr Basil Cameron
Byron Shire Council



Cr Simon Richardson
Byron Shire Council
(Resigned 30/04/2021)



Cr Robert Mustow
Richmond Valley
Council



Cr Sandra Humphrys
Richmond Valley
Council



Cr Vanessa Ekins
Lismore City Council



Cr Darlene Cook
Lismore City Council

BULK WATER SUPPLY

“We provide water in bulk to local government areas of Ballina, Byron, Lismore and Richmond Valley – our principal water supply source is Rocky Creek Dam”

We are the regional water supply authority providing water in bulk to the local government areas of Lismore (excluding Nimbin), Ballina (excluding Wardell), Byron (excluding Mullumbimby) and Richmond Valley (excluding land to the west of Coraki).

A population of around 110,000 is serviced by this water supply system with the area of operations being approx. 3,000km². The regional supply network includes around 43,000 connections within the reticulation areas of the local government areas it services and nearly 2,000 retail connections to our trunk main system.

Reticulation of the water within the urban centres is the responsibility of our member councils.

The principal source of our supply network is Rocky Creek Dam (RCD) situated 25km north of Lismore near the village of Dunoon. The dam has a storage capacity of 14,000ML. Other available sources under our control include Emigrant Creek Dam (ECD), Convery's Lane and Lumley Park bores in the Alstonville area, as well as bores in the Richmond Valley area.

Our water infrastructure is valued at more than \$250M. This includes the physical trunk main and pipeline system as well as reservoirs, RCD, ECD, Wilson River Source, two Water Treatment Plants (Emigrant Creek and Habbie Habib Nightcap) and some areas made available to the public in and around RCD and ECD.



Rocky Creek Dam

FLOOD MITIGATION

“We manage 80km of levees, 750 individual floodgates and 180km of drains, which work together to reduce inundation and divert floodwater”.

Rous is the local Flood Mitigation Authority for the Lismore City, Richmond Valley and Ballina Shire local government areas; an area well known for its flooding. We have a proud history of mitigating the impact of floods on the community, dating back to 1959.

Rocky Creek Dam

Our service delivery relates to maintenance of existing flood mitigation infrastructure and managing the natural resource impacts resulting from the operation of this infrastructure.

We manage 80km of levees, 750 individual floodgates and 180km of drains, which work together to reduce inundation and divert floodwater. This infrastructure is very important to the communities who live and work along the Richmond River. In addition, we also have a role in relation to a levee and related infrastructure designed to protect the central business district of Lismore against a 1 in 10-year flood.

While levees, floodgates and drains provide flood mitigation, unfortunately, over time this infrastructure may contribute to poor water quality and fish kills, altering wetlands and changing the natural environment. Rous County Council is committed to continue working cooperatively with landowners to reduce this impact.

The Rocky Mouth Creek floodgates are an example of the infrastructure that Rous County Council manages. Located near the village of Woodburn, these six large floodgates have prevented Richmond River floodwaters from inundating land up Rocky Mouth Creek since 1965.

Outside of flood times, these floodgates are kept winched open to allow tidal water to exchange between the river and the creek. This improves water quality and benefits aquatic life. Council has an Active Floodgate Management Plan for Rocky Mouth Creek which is a voluntary agreement with the landowners on how the floodgates will be managed to reduce their environmental impact. We also monitor water quality at Rocky Mouth Creek with a continuous datalogger.

We also have a strong interest in activities such as hydrological research, flood surveying and modelling. This enables us to better understand flood behaviours and the impact of flooding on the catchment and floodplain.

As a flood mitigation authority, we also partner with our constituent councils to coordinate the preparation and submission of grant funding applications for agreed regional projects.

WEED BIOSECURITY

Exercising powers and duties in relation to weed biosecurity, identifying and managing high-risk weed species.







Exclude new weeds (prevent them establishing in our region).

Eradicate or contain any new weeds found in our region (eliminate them or stop their spread).

Effectively manage the impacts of widespread invasive weed species.

Build capacity in our region to help the community, industry and government commit to long-term management of invasive weeds.

We focus on:

-  Identification and management of high-risk weed species and how they spread into and within our region.
-  Improving our capacity to find new weeds early.
-  Ensuring we have the resources and procedures to take rapid strategic control measures against new weeds in our region.
-  Directing our resources to where benefits will be the greatest.
-  Increasing community commitment and involvement in proactive weed management.
-  We also deliver weed biosecurity services under a service level agreement to Kyogle and Tweed Shire Councils.

PLANNING AND DELIVERY

“The Future Water Project (FWP) is a plan to secure the community’s precious drinking water supplies over the next 40 years and beyond”

The Future Water Project (FWP) 2060 is a plan to secure the community’s precious drinking water supplies over the next 40 years and beyond.

The FWP 2060 was subject to two extensive public exhibition periods during 2020/21 prior to Council’s adoption in July 2021.

The FWP received significant community feedback in helping to shape a robust regional water security plan.

The Project identifies the new water sources needed to ensure long-term water security for major parts of the Northern Rivers region. It builds on extensive investigations undertaken by Rous over the last few decades to find a viable solution for permanently increasing our water supply. It has been specifically developed through the outcomes of research and technical studies undertaken as part of the Future Water Strategy’s 2014 key actions.

An enhanced Demand Management Plan has been adopted and is being implemented. Water conservation and demand management is a long-term program and will be part of any solution chosen.

At the heart of the Project is the Integrated Water Cycle Management (IWCM) Plan. This is a framework to help water utilities identify water management problems, address these problems, determine the appropriate management responses and manage the impacts of the problems so that social, environmental and economic objectives are met. The IWCM has three stages:

- Stages 1 and 2 focus on sourcing groundwater from the Clarence-Moreton Basin (deep below Alstonville’s aquifer) as well as the Tyagarah area’s underground aquifer to boost Council’s regional supply and meet forecasted demand over the next 20 years.
- These stages also prioritise the continued implementation of more innovative water conservation measures to better manage regional demand.
- Stage 3 will depend on the outcome of extensive investigations into the potential use of purified recycled water, desalination and more groundwater schemes as additional water sources beyond 2040.



PLANNING AND DELIVERY WORKS

St Helena pipeline – Stage 1

Trunk main augmentation

As part of our program to augment existing bulk water supplies to the coastal regions, Rous has engaged contractors to construct a new 660mm diameter Mild Steel Cement Lined (MSCL) pipeline from Dorrroughby to Binna Burra. This new pipeline runs parallel to an abandoned 300mm diameter cast iron main that was constructed in the 1950s. Stage 1, which consists of the first 4700 metres of the pipe chainage, is now complete.

A Contract for the remaining 8500 metres of pipe supply and installation (Stage 2) was also awarded to Ledonne Constructions P/L during the reporting period. Stage 2 works completed during the period include, pipe deliveries, storage area preparation, clearing and access track construction.

Key project statistics:

- Total pipe length: 13,200 meters
- Start: Dorrroughby (Lismore 600 cross connection)
- Finish: Binna Burra (Friday Hut Road cross connection)
- Construction Stage 1 – Length: 5500m
- Construction Stage 2 – Length: 7700m
- Stage 1 Contract duration: 52 weeks
- Stage 2 Contract duration; 70 weeks
- Affected landholders: 45 (total)



Water main performance

Council experienced 15 water main breaks during 2020/21 which equates to 3.3 breaks per 100km of water mains. This was better than the Council internal performance target of 12.6 breaks per 100km of water mains and the 2019 national median of 13.5 breaks per 100km of water mains.

There were 5 breaks within the trunk network and 10 water main breaks within the reticulation system. 4 of the pipeline breaks were on pipelines identified for replacement within the Capital Works Plan with the remaining pipeline failures related to localised pipeline defects or accidental damage. Water main breaks generally result from age and general deterioration of the water main and can be influenced by soil type, rainfall, pipe material and age and condition of the network. Other factors such as disturbance from nearby construction works can also contribute to leaks or water main failures. The downward trend and excellent result for interruption to supply of water to customers has been met through targeted asset management and ongoing capital replacement strategies.

CAPITAL AND PROJECT WORKS

The following projects from the capital works program were completed during the reporting period or are in progress:

Works completed

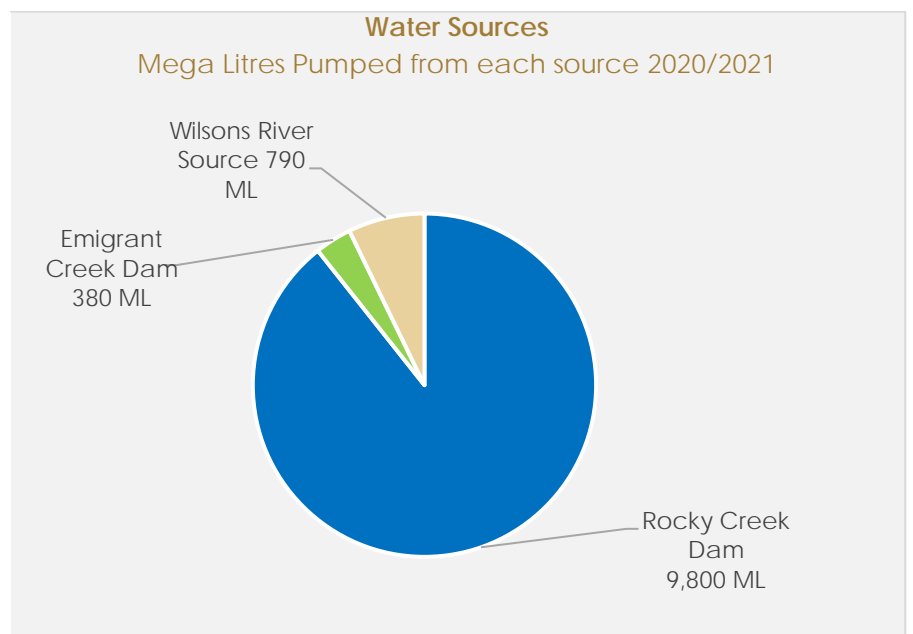
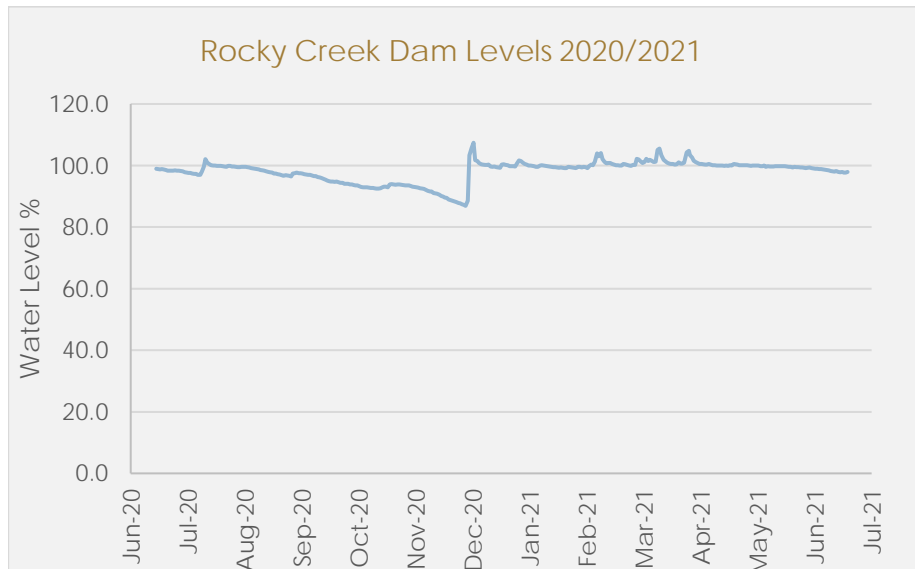
- Nightcap Water Treatment Plant raw water upgrade
 - Replacement of raw water pumps supplying dam water to Nightcap Water Treatment Plant.
 - Upgrade of pump switchboard, switch room and installation of variable speed drives.
- Nightcap Water Treatment Plant fibre network
 - Fibre communication network installed throughout water treatment plant to modernise operations.
- Nightcap Water Treatment Plant chemical tank farm upgrade
 - Purchase and installation of self-bunded chemical tanks for coagulant chemical.
 - Progressed upgrade options assessment for other bulk chemicals.
- Lismore 900 main corrosion repairs and painting
 - Completed corrosion repairs on critical trunk main.
- Greenhouse Gas Abatement Strategy
 - Installation of solar system on Kyogle Street Depot.
 - Installation of solar system on Woodburn Depot.
- Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) implementation
 - Installation of accessible toilet, ramp and disabled carpark works at Nightcap WTP.
- Levee heavy maintenance and renewal
 - Renewal works carried out.
- Levee and pipe renewal
 - Duck Creek.
- Floodgate renewal program
 - Replacement of major floodgates carried out including Ryans, Ferris, Emigrant Creek, Maguires Creek, Dungarubba, Llewellyns, Breakfast Point, Collyers and Pelican Creek.
 - Lifting gear renewed or replaced at Empire Vale, Ryans, Ferris and Andersons.
 - Replacement of floodgates during the year because of damage and fair wear and tear at Coraki, South Ballina, Broadwater, Swan Bay, Bungawalbyn and Woodburn.
 - Walking platforms renewed at Dungarubba Canal.

Works in progress (commenced during the reporting period)

- Lismore to Woodburn water main investigations
 - Trial of pipe relining technology undertaken on failing section of pipeline south of Wyrallah
 - Investigations continued into solutions for management of aging water mains.
- Development of a Dam Safety Management System to meet NSW Regulations commenced.
- Updating modelling of flood behaviour for Rocky Creek and Emigrant Creek Dams.
- Partnering with Richmond Valley Council in their development on an updated flood model for Casino and the mid-Richmond to assist with future discussions around the Tuckombil canal.
- Nightcap WTP chemical tank farm upgrade
 - Design of bunded chemical storage tank facility to finalise project in optimising water treatment chemical dosing at Nightcap WTP.
- Nightcap WTP raw water jetty and rising main
 - Repainting of the Nightcap WTP raw water jetty steelwork and raw water rising main to address and prevent corrosion.
- Rocky Creek Dam and Emigrant Creek Dam aeration equipment
 - Continuing to investigate concept designs and options for the replacement of RCD and aeration equipment.
- Broadwater water supply upgrade
 - Stage 1 replacement of bulk water pipeline to Broadwater Reservoir.
- Lismore 600/525 mains corrosion repairs and painting
 - Planning and investigations commenced.
- Reservoir refurbishments – Pineapple Road
 - Preliminary works and investigations to decommission the reservoir.
- Additional bulk water fill stations
 - Investigations into suitable locations for two additional bulk water fill stations in Lismore and Byron local government areas continued.
- Planning and design for water reticulation projects
 - Grace Road reticulation.
 - Richmond Hill reticulation.

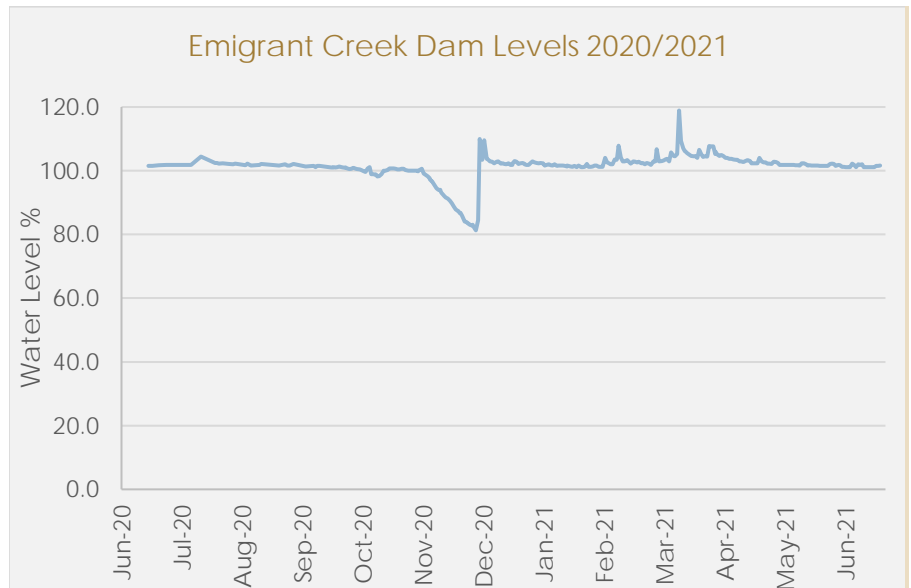
Dam and sources

The water level at Rocky Creek Dam dropped below 95% during the reporting period which triggered pumping from Emigrant Creek Dam and the Wilsons River source. Bore sources were not required. During the reporting period, more than 11,000 ML of water was produced from available sources:



Emigrant Creek Dam

Water extraction from Emigrant Creek Dam commenced in early October 2020. The lowest recorded dam level for the reporting period was 81% in mid-December 2020.



Emigrant Creek Dam Water Treatment Plant

WATER SUPPLY AND SERVICE

Water Treatment Plant Infrastructure

The Nightcap Water Treatment Plant is the primary water treatment infrastructure supplying its constituent councils with water in bulk. The plant was constructed in 1992 with the ability to treat 70 million litres of water per day. The plant has undergone several upgrades since 1992 with the installation of the ozone and biological activated carbon filter in 2008.

Due to the incremental changes to treatment process, the need to replace some critical infrastructure having long lasting consequences, the change to future water demands from the plant and introducing new water sources into the network, a strategic review of the plant was commenced in late 2020.

The project reviewed the current processes and how they meet full design capabilities during live operation. The live operational capacities were established and compared to the intended design capacities of the various processes, and recommendations made to further optimise the performance of the plant. In addition to process investigations, an asset condition assessment has been completed, which grades the assets in terms of condition and serviceability and advises on a prioritised program of works for minor repair through to asset replacement.

This project straddles two financial years. The above work completed in 2021 forms the basis for investigating options for future changes required to address risk and regulatory requirements.



Nightcap Water Treatment Plant

Water quality management systems

We implement a multi-barrier approach to water quality management – this means that at each stage of the water collection, storage and delivery process, we actively manage water quality. Catchment protection is a key barrier in drinking water quality protection. Minimising contamination before it reaches the Water Treatment Plant is a vital step in reducing drinking water- related quality risks. This approach is reflected in Rous's Drinking Water Management System (DWMS).

The DWMS follows the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines (ADWG) framework for management of drinking water quality. The ADWG framework takes a multiple-barrier, catchment-to-tap approach to water quality management. This helps ensure water quality risks are managed throughout the whole supply process with appropriate monitoring and review.

In addition to our DWMS, Rous also collects drinking water samples on behalf of NSW Health for analysis by NSW Health laboratories. These samples are taken in the distribution system and are representative of the water supplied, with a minimum number of samples for each water supply system recommended by NSW Health. The results from this free-of-charge service are then published on-line through NSW Health's NSW Drinking Water Database.

An annual water quality summary report card for 2020/21 is available on Council website under The Region's Water Supply: [Annual water quality summary reports](#)

Water distribution

The operational response to the risk of COVID impact on critical water operations staff implemented in March 2020 was maintained until October 2020. This response included separation of staff into teams and postponing large projects which would increase the chance of all operators needing to work in close contact with each other on site. Day-to-day operations were maintained well by staff, but unfortunately this meant that larger planned projects, such as a valve replacement on the Lismore 600 main and cleaning of the Ballina 375 main by pigging had to be delayed. An extended wet period over the summer months meant that the works were not able to be carried out within the financial year.

Despite the limitations, Rous continued to provide drinking water to customers and constituent councils, responding rapidly to breaks and complying again with the standards in the ADWG.

Dam safety

Rous owns and operates two declared bulk water storage dams, one in the higher reaches of the Rocky Creek, a tributary of the Wilsons River i.e., Rocky Creek Dam and a second dam on the Emigrant Creek, a tributary of the Richmond River i.e., Emigrant Creek Dam.

The development and implementation of a Dam Safety Management System by dam owners in NSW is a legislative requirement set out in the Dam Safety Regulation 2019.

The Regulation stipulates requirements that are in force at commencement of the Act on 1 November 2019, with update / review frequencies, as well as the requirements which will come into force after 1 Nov 2021.

To comply with current and future obligations, there are number of plans which need to be updated including the development of a new Dam Safety Management System, the performance of Safety reviews, emergency exercises and reporting and several other requirements at specified frequencies.

Rous has been compliant with dams' safety and prior to the enactment of the new regulations was meeting all the requirements of the Australian National Committee on Large Dams (ANCOLD).

Rous has embarked on the development of the newly required Dams Safety Management System and review of its operations and Maintenance Plans. This initial work is planned to be finalised in 2021, with the continuous development and updating of other plans as required in future years.



Rocky Creek Dam

Rocky Creek Dam



Emigrant Creek Dam

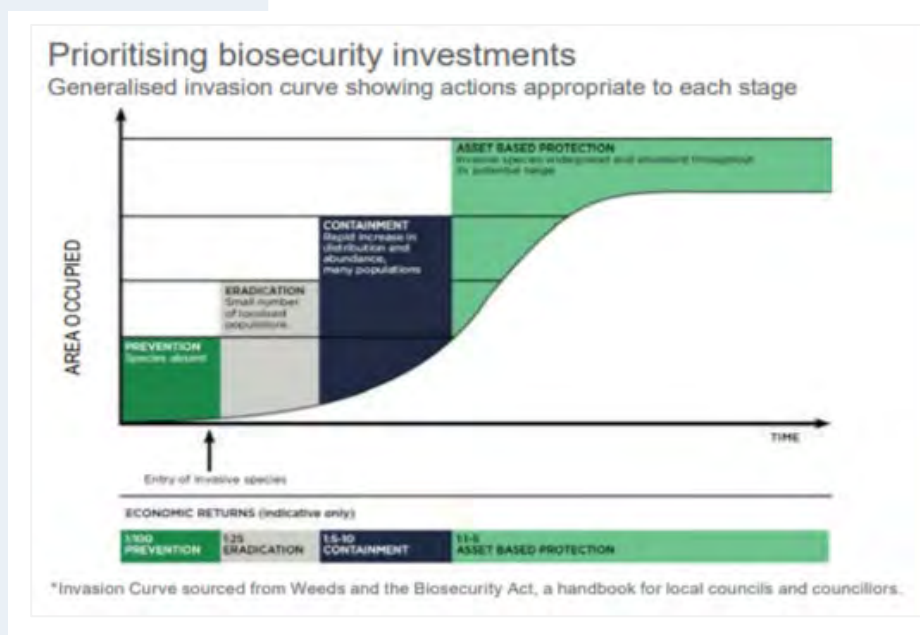
WEED BIOSECURITY

Weed biosecurity

Weed biosecurity services extend beyond the four constituent councils of Ballina, Byron, Lismore and Richmond Valley, to include Tweed Shire and Kyogle. All services are covered by a Service Level Agreement. For Tweed and Kyogle Shires a fee-for-service arrangement is in place for Rous to fulfil each Council's NSW Weeds Action Program NSW and regulatory services obligations, rather than the financial contribution provided by the constituent councils.

Under the Invasive Species Plan of NSW, and with the continuation of the Weeds Action Program, Rous has continued with its pro-active contemporary weed management approach. This approach mirrors the goals and themes of the Australian Weeds Strategy and the NSW Biodiversity Reform.

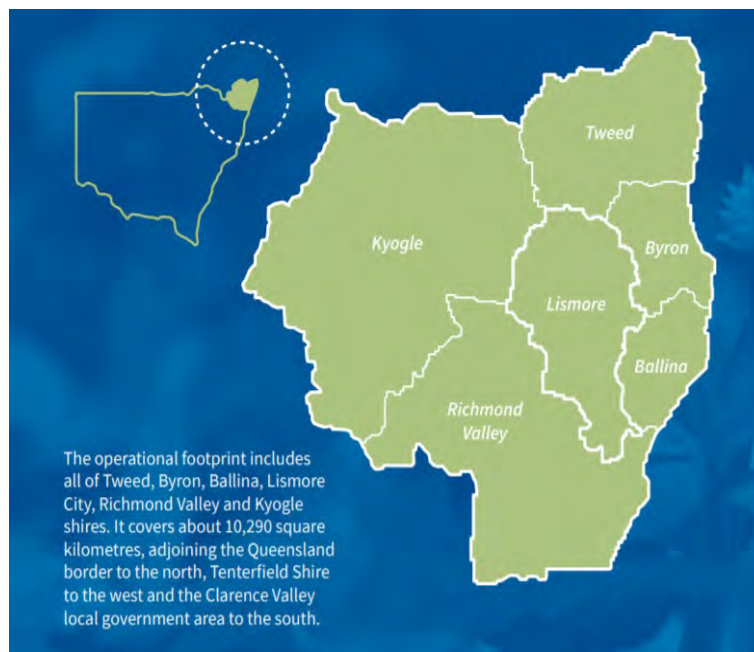
The diagram below illustrates the contemporary management platform that focuses on a rapid re new and emerging weeds while preventing introduction of new weeds to our region. The higher the weed on the invasion curve, the more widespread and economically unviable it is to eradicate and control. Our weed management programs target weeds in the prevention and eradication stage in line with the diagram below. While we also work with regional partners and stakeholders to minimise the impacts of weeds in the containment and asset-based protection phases.



Rous continues to undertake strategic control projects for new and emerging weeds across our areas of responsibility. This includes inspection of high-risk areas to ensure new weed incursions are detected and controlled before they can establish, as well as the control of regional high priority weeds species.

Our biosecurity goals

Rous works with a wide range of stakeholders to combat the spread of targeted weeds in the Northern Rivers region of NSW and is the local control authority responsible for administering the Biosecurity Act 2015 for weeds in the region.



Rous's approach to weed management has strong links with the NSW Biosecurity Strategy, NSW Invasive Species Plan and the NSW Weeds Action Program.

Weed management reflects the following key themes:

- ✦ Identification and management of high risk weed species and the pathways they use to spread into and within our region.
- ✦ Formulation of new weed detection systems to improve our capacity to find new weeds early (prohibited matter).
- ✦ Ensuring we have the resources and procedures in place to undertake rapid strategic control measures against new weed incursions.
- ✦ Continual analysis of our weed management programs to ensure we are directing resources to where benefits will be greatest.
- ✦ Increasing the community commitment and involvement in proactive weed management approaches.

High risk and high priority species management

During the reporting period, Rous continued to target weeds that can feasibly be prevented from establishing. This approach has specific strategies that encompass detection, control and extension activities to achieve this. The goal of long-term eradication of our region's high priority weed species is now considered economically and technically feasible due to the targeted approach taken by Rous in partnership with key community stakeholders and agencies. These species are:

Senegal tea plant	Tropical soda apple (Control order)
Hymenachne	Chinese violet (Control order)
Seeded banana	Aleman grass
Paper mulberry	Miconia (prohibited matter)
Cecropia	Water lettuce
Kidney leaf mud plantain	Tobacco weed
Parthenium (Prohibited matter)	Amazonian frogbit (Prohibited matter)

In addition to the high priority weeds listed, there are 10 high risk species being targeted to prevent establishment in the region:

Koster's curse	Prickly acacia
Witchweed	East Indian hygrophila
Siam weed	Blue heliotrope
Mikania	Horsetail
Pond apple	Black knapweed

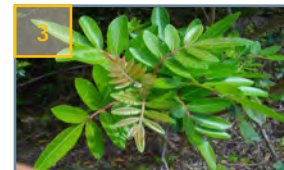
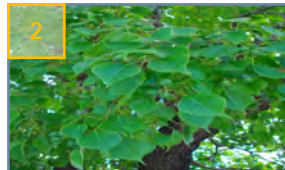
Two of these species have previously been found and controlled within the region, and four are known to be within 150km of our operational border. This highlights the importance of remaining vigilant and maintaining the current approach to contemporary weed management. This will ensure resources are targeted to where they will deliver the best return on investment for the region.

Rous's program of targeted extension and awareness initiatives has increased the level of reporting of new infestations by the community and raised the level of commitment and participation of the public towards the management of high priority weeds.

With the ongoing application of Tropical soda apple and Chinese violet Ministerial Control Orders, significant resources have been directed to finding and eradicating these weeds. Over 340 properties have been found with Tropical soda apple and three locations of Chinese violet. Strict compliance and intensive control programs have occurred as a result, and Rous continues to work with key stakeholders to halt the threats posed by these weeds on our region. Over 3,500 properties were inspected, and Rous will continue to focus heavily on eradication programs for these State-wide legislated weeds.

Priority weeds

1. Groundsel bush 2. Chinese tallow and 3. Broad leaf pepper tree remain a source of concern as they continue to spread throughout the region. Work on these species has occurred at identified areas to try and minimise further spread. Information brochures have been developed with tips on identification, control and reporting techniques. These brochures have been distributed to targeted areas informing landowners of the risks and providing best practice guidelines for control.



Continued partnerships to protect priority assets

This year Rous has continued with the approach of listing weeds as “contain/asset protection” in the Regional Weed Management Plan. Rous established partnerships with Landcare groups within the region to undertake projects that support community action on widespread weeds. The program engages local Landcare groups to complete on-ground weed control projects that have a significant impact on weed species and protecting the region’s priority assets.

This collaborative approach sees six different year-long projects targeting weeds such as Honey locust, Coral tree, Job’s tears and Bitou bush, among others.

The program represents a shift in focus from traditional activities around widespread weed control to a more targeted and strategic approach at a landscape scale. Our focus and priority rests with high risk and high priority species, but widespread weeds require a collaborative and community focussed effort, particularly in terms of educating landowners of the benefits of best practice weed management and transforming that into on-ground effort.

Biological control

Biological control, or biocontrol, complements the integrated weed management approach adopted in our area and is an important tool for Rous. Biocontrol involves using a natural agent (typically an insect or fungus) to help control a target weed.

Over the past year, Rous has assisted with 12 requests for biocontrol to tackle weeds including Crofton weed, Cat’s claw creeper, Madeira vine, Salvinia and Water hyacinth. Unfortunately, due to the ongoing COVID restrictions, agents were not being reared and released at the same rate as usual.

Rous plays a critical role in facilitating the community’s uptake of biocontrol agents by promoting it as a tactic, identifying suitable sites and willing landowners, and sourcing and releasing the agents onsite.

Rous is an important link between research organisations that are breeding and developing biocontrol agents (NSW Department of Primary Industries) and landowners with weed issues. Rous has been an active proponent of biocontrol for more than 30 years.

Weed management on roadsides

Rous continues to apply resources toward control of weeds over the 12,000km of public roads across our region.

Road networks provide pathways for invasive plants to spread throughout the region. Due to the diversity of weed species present on roadsides in the Council area, eradication and control of all roadside weeds is deemed impractical and not cost effective.

Currently in northern NSW there are many weed species that have already established themselves and are widespread throughout the area. They can be spread by various means such as wind, waterways, animals, machinery and the road network itself.

A strategic approach focuses limited resources toward the control of weed species where control will provide the greatest benefit. Resources available for roadside weed control are strategically allocated towards those plants that are classed as State Prohibited Weeds, Regionally Prohibited Weeds and Regionally Controlled Weeds as well as weeds that are recognised as new and emerging threats.

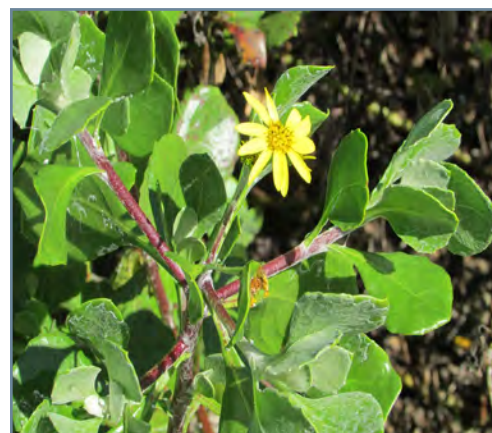
In addition to conventional treatment methods, Rous also uses a selection of bio-control agents to assist in the management of widespread weed species that exist within the public road network.

Weed species treated on roadsides for the reporting period include the following targeted priority weeds:

Giant devil's fig	Kudzu
Yellow bells	Honey locust
Groundsel bush	Chinese tallow
Mysore thorn	Chinese celtis
Broad-leaf pepper tree	Bitou bush



Chinese celtis



Bitou bush

FLOOD MITIGATION

Continued roll-out of inspection program

In 2017 an inspection program was developed and instituted to ensure that all flood mitigation assets were inspected for condition ratings and operational requirements. These inspections are programmed based on a risk assessment of our assets, to ensure that high risk assets are inspected more regularly. The inspection program has led to the development of replacement, renewal, and maintenance programs. Technical staff now have current and Rous specific data for determining the design age of assets. This work, including the inspections, maintenance, and renewal work over the last four years has given us a solid foundation for building a class-leading asset management program for our flood mitigation assets.



RCC staff monitoring water quality at Keith Hall Drainage System

Duck Creek East

Continual bypassing of pipes discharging through a levee at Duck Creek East has been historically addressed by attempting to dig out and replace sections with poured concrete thrust blocks. The issue has persisted, and so with relevant permits in place and support from DPI Fisheries and the landowner, Rous carried out an internal design and construct project to address the bypassing. The old infrastructure, including very large sections of bulk concrete were removed, before new pipes were installed, and the site rehabilitated. Subsequent site visits have confirmed that not only was the work carried out to a high standard but also continues to prove to be an alternative solution to the problem.



Duck Creek floodgate

Riley's Hill drain maintenance

Landowners contacted Rous in 2019 to advise of significant slumping of the banks of Riley's Hill Drain requiring repairs. Once again with relevant permits in place, the support from DPI Fisheries, Rous carried out an internal design and construct project to correct the slumping and clean out a section of the drain at the same time. There were delays because of heavy rain at the end of June. Recognising the risks involved of creating further damage to the ground surface and the water quality works were completed once the ground water levels had dropped enough to provide a safe, dry work site.

March 2021 flood damage

During late March 2021, the Northern Rivers Region, together with many other areas around NSW, experienced heavy rain and flooding. As a result of significant falls around Coraki and within the Bungawalbyn Creek catchment, two of Rous's flood mitigation assets were damaged.

The Bungawalbyn East Levee was overtopped and was subsequently breached, leaving a significant gap in the levee and downstream impacts from the significant volume of water that flowed through during the event. The levee repair works were due to commence early in the 2021/22 financial year.

The second site affected was the West Coraki Drain, south of Coraki. High water levels in the drain and heavy rain saturated the bank of the drain and caused a landslip within the drain bank. The landslip occurred below a house, with the back scarp of the landslip affecting the property's fence. Investigations and design have progressed for this large and complex project, and it is planned for the work to commence before the end of 2021.

As the Richmond Valley Council was declared a Natural Disaster Area from rain and flooding, Council will be able to access funding for the work to repair these important public flood assets.

Active Floodgate Management Program (AFMP)

For the past 20 years, Council has worked with landowners, the sugar cane industry and DPI Fisheries to actively manage floodgates across the Richmond floodplain. Rous's AFMP is an important strategy in reducing the natural resource impact of the floodgates and drains that Rous has management responsibility for.

Active management refers to the opening of floodgates during non-flood periods to allow tidal water to exchange between the river or creek and the drainage system. This improves drain water quality and enhances aquatic habitat and allows fish passage. Council has an AFMP for each of its floodgates that are actively managed.

Rous currently has 52 AFMPs. During 2020/21, eight of those Plans were reviewed, updated and landowner on-going support secured to continue this important activity.

Some AFMPs are implemented by landowner volunteers. In 2020/21 the landowner volunteer floodgate operator program was re-endorsed by Council. The program allows endorsed volunteers to open floodgates on behalf of Council to allow tidal flushing. These volunteers are trained and assessed on their ability to operate the floodgates safely. The landowner volunteer program builds and strengthens Council's relationship with landowners, which is beneficial in delivering the overall flood mitigation program.



Landowner volunteer floodgate operator opening a floodgate

Keith Hall Drainage Options Study

Commencing in September 2020, the Keith Hall Drainage Options Study is a collaborative initiative between Rous County Council, Ballina Shire Council and the landowners. The Study is a unique opportunity to look at a floodplain drainage system with new eyes and to explore changes that would improve water quality, benefit landowners and Rous in terms of on-going maintenance and function of the system.

Drainage systems like Keith Hall at South Ballina are historical, constructed before its environmental impact was understood or without the aid of new technology. The Study is an opportunity to explore how the drainage system could be redesigned using current scientific understanding and technology. The Study is being undertaken by the Water Research Laboratory based at the University of New South Wales.

Landowner support is critical to the success of the project, and Rous staff have engaged landowners throughout all stages. The project was developed with the landowner's input and commenced when their support had been gained. Since then, the landowners have had input into the study as it progressed. To complement the study, Rous staff have also closely monitored water quality discharging from the drainage system over the year, identifying the issues and when they occurred.



Keith Hall Drainage Options Study landowner engagement Oct 2020

Monitoring impact of La Nina floods on water quality

Council staff were busy monitoring water quality in the Richmond River estuary during the Summer of 2020-2021. Prolonged wet weather and flooding of low-lying areas of the floodplain in December 2020 and again in March 2021 saw water running off these low-lying areas become low in oxygen, and in some areas Blackwater formed.

Oxygen levels in the Richmond River estuary reached critical levels after both flood events. Following the pre-Christmas flood, dissolved oxygen levels in the Richmond River at Wardell ranged between 2 and 0.5mg/L, and following the March flood, dissolved oxygen levels at Woodburn were as low as 2 and 1.5mg/L. These levels are considered lethal to aquatic life (optimal levels are 7-8mg/L).

Blackwater is created from grass and other plants breaking down or rotting in floodwater. The organic matter in Blackwater can consume large amounts of dissolved oxygen which can be harmful to fish and other aquatic life.

While this is a natural process, Blackwater conditions are more frequent and severe because the lowest lying areas on the floodplain have been historically drained. Reducing drainage of the lowest lying areas of the floodplain will decrease Blackwater creation, but this is difficult to do because of the impact on the agriculture that occurs there.

During these times, Rous implements its Blackwater Response Plan. The Response Plan outlines Council's role in monitoring water quality and conditions, providing that advice to the DPI Fisheries (the lead agency for fish kills) and our constituent councils. Rous works cooperatively with all relevant stakeholders to raise awareness of blackwater and the complexity in addressing it.



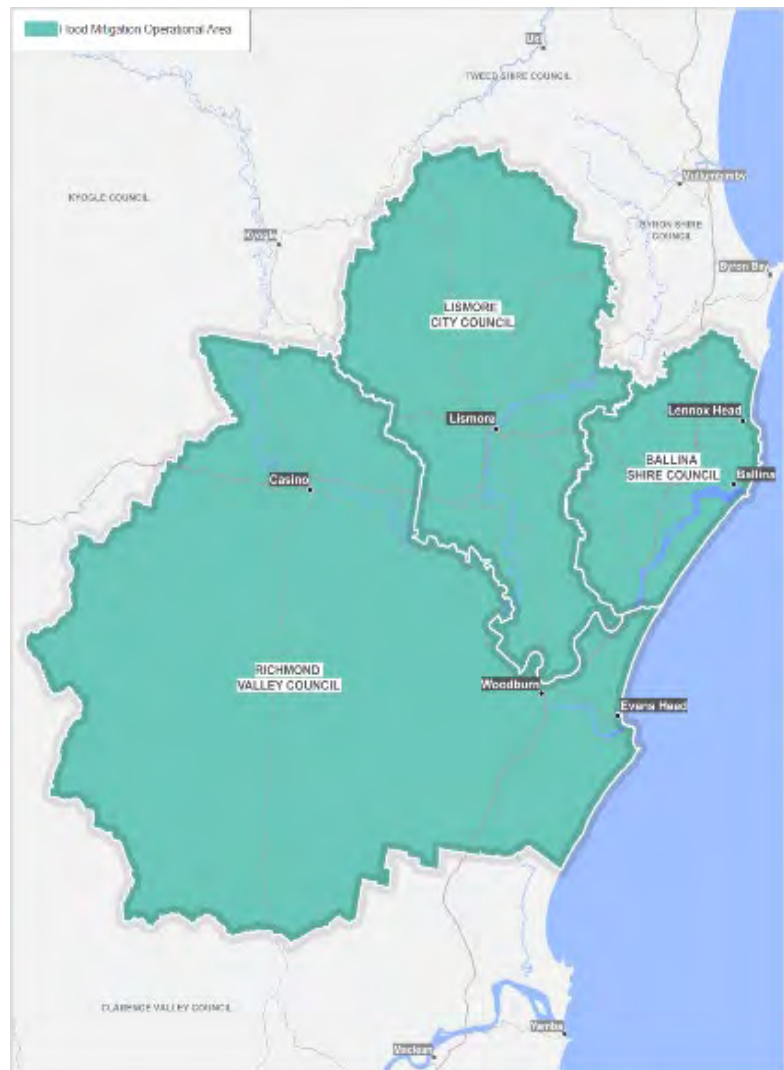
Blackwater discharging from a drainage system at Bungawalbyn in April 2021

Tuckean Steering Committee

Rous staff have continued to participate and contribute to the Tuckean Steering Committee, a diverse stakeholder group who are overseeing the implementation of the Tuckean Hydrologic Options Study.

Strategic review of the flood mitigation function

Rous services the flood mitigation function of Lismore City Council, Richmond Valley Council and Ballina Shire Council. All are located within the Richmond River catchment:



Flood mitigation area of operation

Strategic review of the flood mitigation function *(continued)*

Since the delegation of the flood mitigation function to Richmond River County Council (RRCC) in 1959, works have been constructed and maintained in the Richmond River catchment. These works were designed to mitigate against the impacts of flooding, with some additional works performed which may have been for agricultural purposes and not necessarily performing a flood mitigation purpose.

There are many legacy practices which have been inherited by Rous and in some instances, it is not clear amongst all the stakeholders in this function, who should be performing the various tasks required when servicing the needs of the community and what Rous should be performing as the flood mitigation authority.

To answer the above questions, Rous staff have embarked on a strategic review of the flood mitigation function and associated natural resource management issues to better understand Rous's obligations and future opportunities within this complex environment.

This work is in its early stage of development and will continue to be developed and discussed with our constituent council partners in 2021/22.



Staff manufacturing new floodgates



Rocky Mouth Creek floodgates

Drinking water catchment quality and health

The quality of the water provided to Rous customers is partly dependent on the quality of the water flowing to the extraction point from the respective catchment areas. The Australian Drinking Water Guidelines (ADWG) state that the most effective means of assuring drinking water quality and the protection of public health is through the adoption of a preventative management approach that encompasses all steps in water production from catchment to consumer. The catchment area forms the first barrier for the protection of the water supply.

Buffer zone management (Rous estate)

Revegetated stream buffer zones serve a range of functions, including filtering sediments and nutrients contained in runoff from upslope, improving stream bank stability, shading of stream and foreshore areas impacting on stream water temperature, algal growth and fish, and providing improved habitat for a range of plants and animals.

These functions improve the quality of the catchment and have a beneficial effect on water quality. Council bush regeneration staff actively manage over 100 ha of Rous-owned buffer zone land for water quality control and weed control purposes including at Rocky Creek Dam, Emigrant Creek Dam and at the Wilsons River Source (Howard's Grass).

Catchment Management Plan 2020-2025

In keeping with the “catchment to tap” management approach recommended in the ADWG, Rous has established a Catchment Management Plan (CMP) for its major drinking water supply catchments. The CMP covers the “catchment to treatment plant” component of the water supply system and forms part of the Rous Drinking Water Quality Management System (DWMS) being implemented by Rous and its customer councils.

Altogether this body of management plans forms the Drinking Water Management System (DWMS) that is required under the *Public Health Act 2010*.

During the reporting period, Rous commenced implementation of the *Catchment Management Plan 2021-2025*. The purpose of the CMP is to set the strategy for the coordinated management of Rous's drinking water catchments for a 5-year period (2020/21 - 2024/25).

The key focus is to minimise the introduction of hazards to source water by maintaining and strengthening the existing catchment controls and undertaking additional tasks to manage catchment risks. If source water is of a high quality, risks are reduced in all later stages of drinking water supply.

Good quality source water requires less complex treatment systems, less chemical additions and reduced cost and energy consumption through treatment processes. The management actions in the CMP were developed from the status of the catchments and identified catchment risks, input from land managers and consideration of the current allocation of resources and funding.

Catchment Management Plan 2020-2025 *(continued)*

Key CMP implementation activities undertaken in 2020/21 are as follows:

- **Wilsons River and Emigrant Creek - River Reach Restoration**

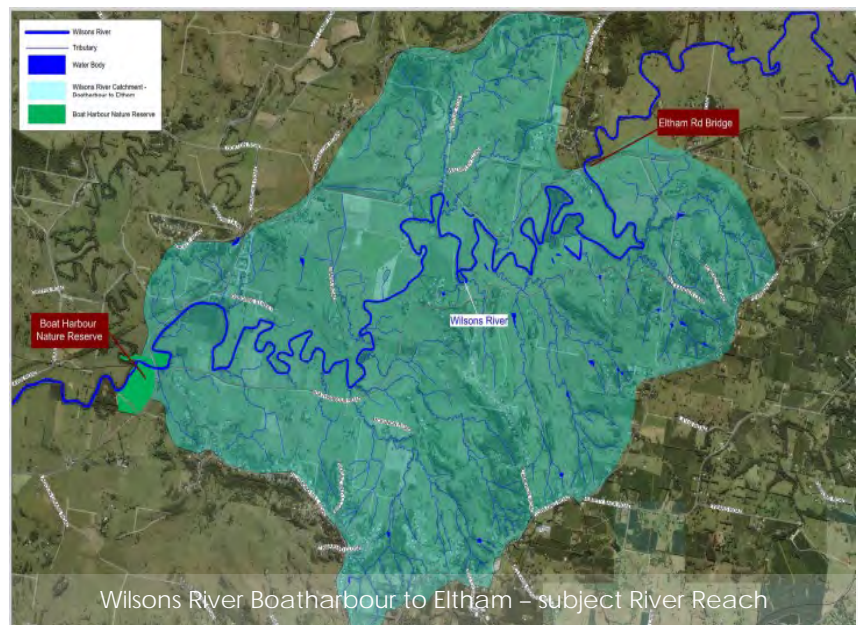
Rous, with support from several bush regeneration contractor teams, has worked in partnership with landholders upstream of Emigrant Creek Dam over three years to undertake creek bank rehabilitation. The project completed in 2020/21 included bush regeneration maintenance along 23 hectares of high priority land on seven properties in the Emigrant Creek catchment.

Similarly, as part of the staged completion of the Wilsons River Tidal Pool River Reach Plan in 2020/21, Rous completed maintenance (weed control) and riparian improvements (infill planting where required) on 9 private properties and four school/university riparian sites in the river reach between Lismore and Boatharbour Nature Reserve.

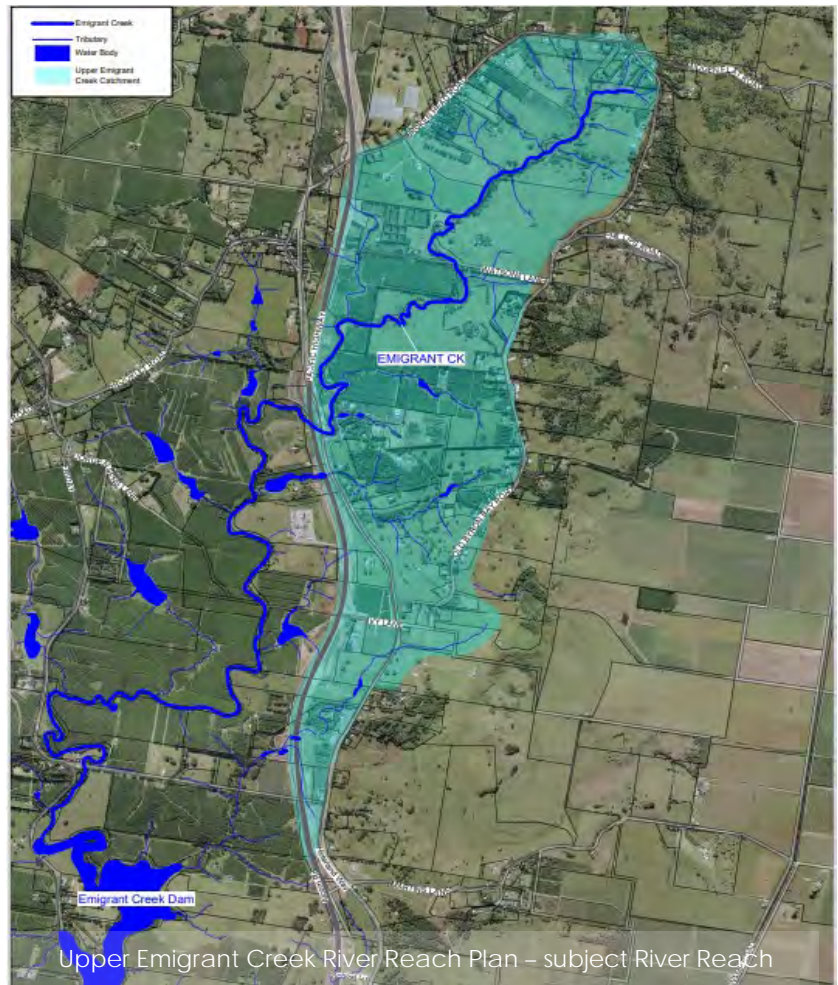
- **Wilsons River and Emigrant Creek – planning for new River Reach Plans**

Rous has commenced the development of two new strategic river reach plans for our catchments, being the Wilsons River catchment in the area of Boatharbour to Eltham; and the Emigrant Creek Dam catchment upstream of the Pacific Highway. The plans will be developed as part of Rous's catchment management program that aims to protect water quality and catchment health.

These plans will identify priority issues within these catchments, the risks and opportunities, and there will be landholder consultation in these areas throughout the process. The next stage will involve the scoping of site action plans and restoration works with interested landowners. The types of actions proposed may include weed control, planting and erosion control works, stock management and in-stream improvements. Development of property-scale plans is purely on a voluntary basis and provides landholders with an opportunity to develop creek improvement plans on a co-operative basis for the mutual benefit of both landholders and the environment.



Catchment Management Plan 2020-2025 *(continued)*



Coastal Zone Management Plan

Richmond River quality monitoring

Rous has conducted automated water quality monitoring in the Richmond River estuary since 2004. The sampling program is aimed at providing information to support planning and management of the estuary. Historically, automatic water quality measurements were undertaken at five locations, supported by manual sampling on a weekly interval at six further locations.

During 2020/21, Rous was successful in securing matching funding from the NSW DPIE Coasts and Estuary Grant program to allow renewal of the Richmond River Water Quality Monitoring Program. This new project differs significantly from previous approaches and has been tailored to meet both the current goals for Rous on the floodplain whilst providing critical data for the DPIE Richmond River Water Quality Management Strategy (RRWQMS).

To ensure that the outputs of the Rous project align with the DPIE RRWQMS, Rous also entered a Research Partnership with SCU GeoScience to provide data logger maintenance, calibration and associated research services for the new grant. This includes design and construction of an all-new data logger network, and the maintenance of the network. Installation of the data logger equipment and associated power/ communications technology involves the mounting of housing on bridges, floodgates, and riverbanks and this will be led by Rous flood mitigation staff.

During 2020/21, new high-tech water quality monitoring equipment has been installed throughout the Richmond River to give information to the community in real time.

The collaborative project between Rous, Southern Cross University and the DPIE has seen the development and installation of unique water quality logging systems to monitor water quality.

A series of eight sites throughout the Richmond River estuary have been established including Bungawalbyn Creek, Rocky Mouth Creek, Wardell, Woodburn, Tuckean Swamp, and North Creek. The project builds on the existing strong relationship between Rous County Council and its partners and these loggers will provide the information needed to help make informed long term management decisions. The Richmond River is a very complex system, and therefore high-quality data is critical to guide any management actions.

Importantly the project also provides the community with access to real time information on salinity, pH, turbidity, dissolved oxygen and more. The previous weekly manual sampling run of the Richmond River main channel is effectively redundant due to the real time data loggers extending from Wardell, Woodburn and Coraki (WaterNSW site), resulting in more useful data regarding blackwater and salinity movement in the river.

The loggers were designed, built and installed by the Southern Cross University team to ensure long term reliability and high accuracy in an affordable package. The loggers measure a range of water quality parameters, with the data uploaded to a publicly accessible [website](#).

A key innovation within the loggers includes pumping water samples to a permanent location out of flood waters, allowing samples to be taken in all conditions with less risk of damage to expensive monitoring equipment.

In a true partnership, the flood mitigation team at Rous designed and installed all solar powered stations that now house the loggers in the various locations across the catchment.

The project is being part-funded through the NSW DPIE Coasts and Estuary Grants Program.

Data from these loggers will help deliver a range of outcomes for the NSW Government Marine Estates Management Strategy. DPIE aim to use the Richmond River as a case study of what can be achieved with good science, management and community engagement.

Data from the loggers can be found on the Rous website: [website](#)



Rous Flood Mitigation Operators
Installing a logger at the Tuckean



Southern Cross University at
Rocky Mouth Creek

Richmond River Riparian Restoration

As part of Rous's commitment to the restoration of the Richmond River and in partnership with constituent councils through the Coastal Zone Management Plan Riparian Restoration Action, Rous has been successful in securing a Fisheries Habitat Action Grant of \$40,000 to contribute towards riparian restoration works on the riverbanks at Coraki in the mid Richmond River estuary.

The project site was selected in late 2020 with input from numerous stakeholders, and a preliminary Site Action Plan was developed by Rous. The works to be funded by the Fisheries Habitat Action Grant, Rous and other council partners (\$80,000 in total in 2021/22 and 2022/23) will restore at least 1.3 km of riverbank area through weed control and revegetation, including the planting of approximately 2500 trees.

The project is significant as it includes funding from Rous, Ballina Shire Council, Richmond Valley Council, Lismore City Council and NSW Fisheries, focussed on a single location in the mid Richmond which has not had much restoration work completed due to funding constraints. The project partners view work on the mid Richmond as benefitting the Richmond River as a whole.



Southern extent of proposed Coraki riparian project



Coastal Management Program

During 2020/21, Rous worked in partnership with its constituent Councils and DPIE to assist with the specification of requirements for the conduct of a Scoping Study as the first stage in the preparation of the Richmond River Coastal Management Program (CMP).

Local councils and public authorities manage their coastal areas and activities in accordance with relevant state legislation, policies and plans. The framework for managing the NSW coast includes:

- *Coastal Management Act 2016* (CM Act)
- *State Environmental Planning Policy (Coastal Management) 2018* (CM SEPP)
- Coastal management programs (CMPs) prepared in accordance with the NSW coastal management manual.

The new CMP must be prepared in accordance with the requirements of the CM Act, the CMSEPP and the NSW Coastal Management Manual Parts A and B (the manual).

Councils are required to complete Stage 1 (scoping study) for new and updated CMPs, regardless of whether they have a CMP, coastal zone management plan (CZMP) or other management plans, policies and practices.

Coastal Management Program *(continued)*

Importantly, it was agreed that this CMP is to work within the Richmond River, its tributaries and estuaries. The approach that Rous and its partners intend to take in meeting the objectives of the CM Act (and CM SEPP), is through consideration of the Richmond River as a coastal river – including catchment and estuary processes and how these contribute to positive outcomes in the coastal zone.

The purpose of a CMP is to set the long-term strategy for the coordinated management of the coastal zone with a focus on achieving the objects of the CM Act and associated catchment-wide objectives. It provides an opportunity for councils, public authorities and local communities to plan for, and implement, actions that will help achieve these objectives at a local level throughout the Richmond River and ultimately meet the objectives of the CM Act within the estuary also. A key feature of the Richmond River CMP will be to establish a suite of actions to provide positive outcomes in both river and estuary health.

Developing a CMP will help councils clearly identify and balance competing interests and priorities in the coastal zone and upstream catchments. Management actions will consider the benefits from economic growth, development and public access to the catchment and estuary along with the need for protecting and enhancing the environment and managing the risk to human life and property.

Following completion of an open tender process in late 2020, Rous engaged consultants for the conduct of the Stage 1 Scoping Study in early 2021. The Scoping Study to be commenced in 2020/21 for the Richmond River will form Stage 1 of the NSW coastal management process embarked on by Rous to develop (in the first instance) a coastal management program for the coastal estuaries and associated catchment areas.

Due to the scale of this project, preparation of the Scoping Study was staged through the preparation of a series of interim deliverables. Work that was completed in 2020/21 included the study area description and mapping; a comprehensive literature review; and the status of existing management actions. The Scoping Study shall be completed in 2021/22, inclusive of a public exhibition process scheduled for February 2022.

GOVERNANCE

Audit Risk and Improvement Committee Performance Review: 2020-2021 - Chair's report

PREPARED BY: BRIAN WILKINSON

(Independent Member – Chairperson, Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee)

Background

The Rous County Council ('Council') Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee Charter (the 'Charter') provides as follows:

"6.3 Assessment of Committee performance

The chairperson of the Committee and General Manager will initiate a review of the performance of the Committee at least once every two years. The review will be conducted on a self-assessment basis (unless otherwise determined by the chairperson of the Committee or Council), with appropriate input from management and any other relevant stakeholders, as determined by the chairperson of the Committee".

A report on the Committee's performance for the 2019-2020 period was submitted to the Committee at its meeting on 27 July 2020. That report, which included information on the Committee's activities up to 30 June 2020, was subsequently reported to Council.

Over recent years the NSW Office of Local Government have been progressing Guidelines that will, once released, update and change the roles and reporting of Audit Risk and Improvement Committees. In consultation with Council Management, this 2021 Committee Performance report has been prepared to progress towards what is anticipated to be the future Committee reporting requirements under the proposed Guidelines (i.e. an ARIC Annual Assurance Report), and to meet the current provisions of the Committee's Charter by providing information on the role and activities of the Committee from July 2020 to June 2021.

Governance

The purpose, role and conduct of the Committee is guided by the Charter and the Internal Audit Charter (the 'IA Charter').

The Charter includes the following purpose for the Committee:

Purpose

[...]

The role of the Committee is to report to Rous County Council and provide appropriate advice and recommendations on matters identified by this Charter. The Committee is independent and therefore operates independently of Council management.

[...]

The Committee has a legislated duty to keep under review the following aspects of Council's operations:

- Compliance
- Risk management
- Fraud control
- Financial management
- Governance
- Implementation of the strategic plan, delivery program and strategies
- Service reviews
- Collection of performance measurement by Council

Any other matters prescribed by regulations made under the LG Act 1993.”

Over the past 12 months the Committee has been mindful and aware of the amendments to the Local Government Act 1993 that are aimed at further defining and embedding the roles and responsibilities of Audit Risk and Improvement Committees as part of the operations and functions of Local Government in NSW.

The Committee’s activities and governance processes have, with the strong support and guidance of the Leadership Team at Council, been aiming to follow the intent of the relevant legislation and the proposed framework outlined in the discussion paper released in late 2019 (and subsequently updated). This approach will place Council in a strong position to meet the requirements included in the proposed Guidelines that will likely be introduced at some time over the next six months. Note: there will be a phase in period for the new Guideline requirements.

During the period July 2020- June 2021 the Committee met five times. The Committee Members (Brian Wilkinson, David Yarnall (outgoing member) / Andrew McLeod (incoming member), and Councillor Darlene Cook) have attended all meetings either in person or via remote technology. In that regard, the Committee appreciates the efforts and arrangements made by Council staff to ensure meetings continued schedule.

In December 2020, the Committee and Council were advised of the decision by David Yarnall to cease in his role as independent member on the Committee. The recruitment process undertaken by Council for a replacement was thorough and successful in attracting strong applicants. The process resulted in Andrew McLeod commencing as the independent member on the Committee in May 2021.

Committee activities

To guide the various meeting agendas and content during the year, a “Schedule of Reporting” was adopted. This resulted in regular reporting on required items; in that regard, the Committee was pleased with the content and presentation of reports. Also, the Committee appreciated that there was consistent attendance and involvement of Council staff at Committee meetings.

The Internal and External Audit Programs of Council have had appropriate reporting and links to the Committee role and meeting agendas. The current Committee Charter and IA Charter are considered appropriate and supportive of the role of the Committee.

The following comments and information provide the views of the Committee in relation to the operations of Council:

Information and reporting has been provided to the Committee in respect of Compliance Monitoring and Reporting. e.g., the use of the NSW Office of Local Government calendar of compliance reporting, and the research and development of a technology solution to suit the size and complexity of councils’ operations.

Regular reporting has been provided on Enterprise Risk Management; this has included information on the Risk Register and actions being taken to mitigate risks. The Committee noted the increasing involvement of staff in risk management processes and the desire by Council to review and improve risk management across the organisation. Work Health and Safety has also been the subject of reporting to the Committee. It was pleasing to note that in the review of the staffing structure and the recruitment of personnel that emphasis is being placed on risk management and its associated processes.

Council has responded to External Audit reports and NSW Audit Office Reports in relation to Fraud Control. The Committee has received reports on actions being taken by staff on Fraud Control, including checklists, awareness and improved business systems.

During the 2020-21 financial year, the Committee has received reports and presentations relating to the Financial Management processes of Council. The External Auditors have engaged closely with the Committee in respect to annual financial statements, Management Letters and the Annual Audit Plan. In addition, the Committee has been kept informed via agenda items on budget preparation, quarterly budget reviews, and investment processes.

As part of the External Audit Management Letters, there are recommended actions to improve Council's approach to various processes. The implementation of those actions is kept under review by the Committee.

As with all local government organisations, the Governance processes at Rous County Council are diverse and are subject to ongoing action. The Committee have received regular reports and information on governance practices and improvements, including:

- Policy, Procedure and delegation reviews,
 - Internal Audit Reports and Actions,
 - Section 355 Committees,
 - Code of Conduct statistics, and
 - The development of the ICT Business Plan.
- During the 2020-21 financial year the Committee received reports and monitored progress on the following internal audit items:
- Work Health and Safety,
 - Asset Management, and
 - Procure to Pay.

An important part of Internal Audit is to identify areas of operational improvement. Whilst in some instances the completion of recommended actions/ improvements takes some time, it is recognised that some actions link into other processes and as such need to be addressed thoroughly.

An integral part of Local Government operations is the Strategic Planning processes and the actions taken to implement strategies.

The Implementation of the Strategic Plan, Delivery Program and Strategies at Rous County Council are supported by comprehensive and understandable documentation. The Committee have received reports and presentations relating to those processes.

The collection of performance management data by Council has been reported to the Committee (and the community) via the Annual Report and the Strategic Plan, Delivery Program and Operational Plan processes.

In addition to the above, the Committee have been kept informed of Other Matters relevant to the role of an ARIC and Council's operations. This has included the Annual Internal Audit Plan, Internal Audit reports, Reports and Publications from the Independent Commission Against Corruption, Information and Privacy Commission of NSW, Performance Audits and Local Government Reports from the Audit Office of NSW.

The Internal Audit Program of Council is undertaken via a third party and is monitored closely by the Committee; in that respect the Committee has input to the annual audit plan (based around identified risks of the Council and the Local Government industry), receives and considers reports from the Internal Auditor and monitors progress made on recommendations in Internal Audit Reports. The scope of the Internal Audit Program can reach across the various operations of Council i.e., Compliance, Governance, Financial Management, Fraud Control, Risk management and Strategic Planning. Reference has been made earlier in this report to the items covered through Internal Audit by the Committee. The Internal Audit Program of Council is considered appropriate at this time.

The scope of the Committee activities identified in this Report supports the view that the Committee is undertaking its required functions in an appropriate manner.

As part of the preparation of this Performance Report consideration has been given to the content of the Charters that guide the role of the Committee. As Chairperson, I have been unable to identify any specific 'failings' of the Committee to meet their obligations and responsibilities. In addition, it is considered that there are no specific matters that need to be brought to the attention of the elected Council.

Financial

The Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee functions and associated actions are funded from existing budget and resource allocations.

Consultation

In providing this report for Committee consideration, the opportunity is available to Committee Members to review the draft Committee performance review and provide feedback and/or suggested amendments. In addition, the General Manager and staff are also requested to provide comments as part of the process of reporting the review to the Committee.

Conclusion

As Chairperson of the Rous County Council Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee, I consider that, as outlined above, the Committee has satisfactorily and appropriately undertaken and performed its role during the 2020-2021 period.

Brian Wilkinson
Chair

Internal audit activities

In November 2020 Council's Internal Audit Partner, Grant Thornton, commenced a 'Procure to Pay' review focusing on procurement and contract management practises at Council.

In March 2021 an Internal Audit Report on the Procure to Pay review was received by Council and subsequently reported to Council's Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee ('Committee').

Consistent with previous internal audit recommendations, quarterly reporting to the Committee on the progress on the implementation of the nine (9) recommendations arising from the Procure to Pay review has commenced.

In March 2021, the Committee also supported a recommendation not to undertake the final audit identified in Council's Internal Audit Strategy 2019/2022 on 'Project Management'. A number of factors informed this decision including the timing of commencement of the Project Management Framework project in the second quarter of 2021/22 and the time / effort required to implement actions arising from the Procure to Pay review.

Internal audit activities *(continued)*

Goal 3.1.5 – Encourage transparency and an effective risk culture across Council

3.1.5.1 Develop a Risk and Assurance Strategy and Implementation Plan

In February 2021, Council adopted a new Risk Management Policy which outlines a series of key aims for Council's Risk Management Strategy, being:

- Embedding risk management in all organisational activities;
- Developing a common understanding of risk and risk management;
- Measuring controls and monitor risk; and
- Continuous improvement in risk management practice.

The new policy also includes an Annual Risk Management Plan, to be reviewed annually, which details the activities to be undertaken to implement Council's Risk Management Strategy. The Plan is an overview of the work Council will undertake each year to embed and sustain a positive risk culture.

It is also a point of reference for the General Manager and Audit Risk and Improvement Committee who will receive progress updates throughout the year.

In October 2020, quarterly reporting to Council's Leadership Team on Risk Management, Governance and Human Resource matters was also commenced.

Goal 3.1.6 – Continually review Council's policies and procedures for suitability and currency

3.1.6.1 Review of policies and procedures for suitability and currency

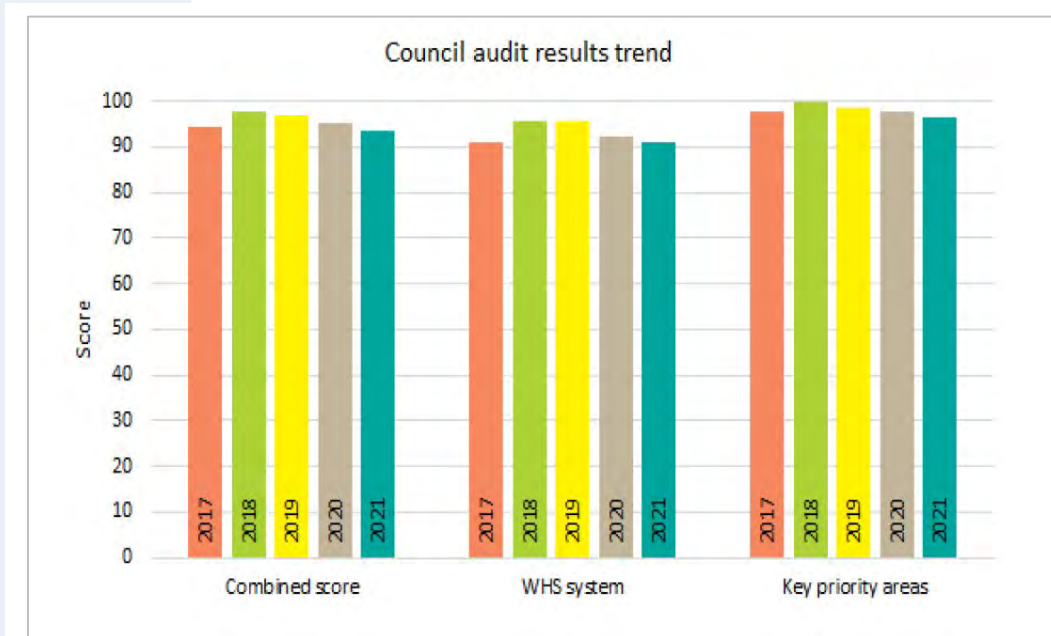
To promote and deliver against Council's commitment to continuous improvement and legislative compliance, the review of Council's policies continued in 2020/21 with a focus on currency and suitability for organisational needs.

During this period, approximately seventeen (17) policies were revoked, and three (3) new policies were adopted by Council.

WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY

StateCover WHS self-audit

Each year Rous undertakes the StateCover self-audit to assist in the evaluation and monitoring of the WHS Management Systems (WHSMS). This comprehensive audit explores a range of issues that are critical to the effective implementation of our WHSMS and the resulting reduction of work injuries and illnesses.



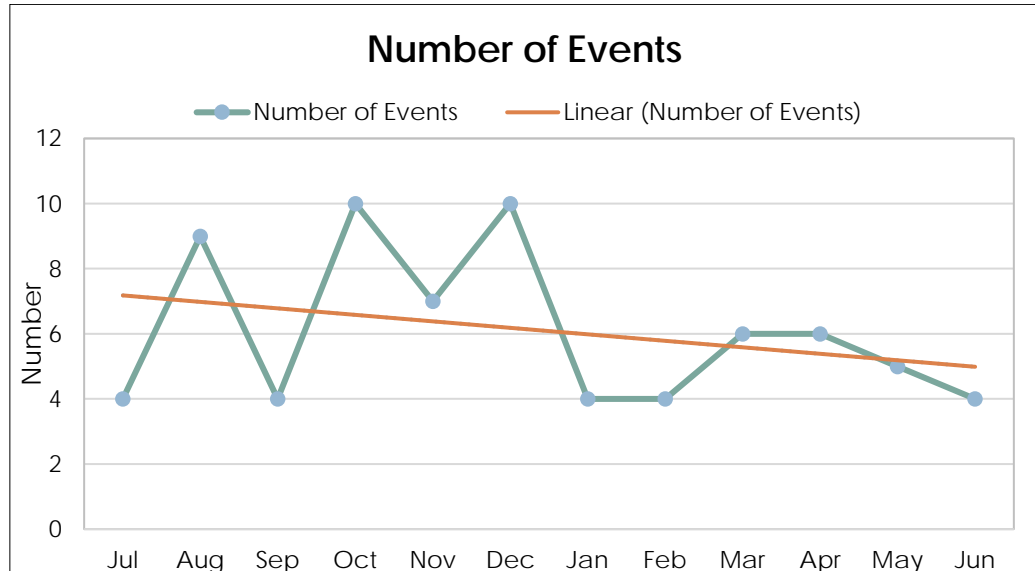
Like last year, StateCover made some changes to the audit sections as part of a continuous improvement approach, providing slightly more thorough and detailed criteria to the questions over several elements.

As a result of these enhancements, this year's ratings for several of the elements and Council's overall score varies slightly this year compared to last year and previous year's score. While slightly lower, the comparable results from this year's audit show that Council is still trending well against the previous years.

WHS comparison trends for 2019/20 - 2020/21

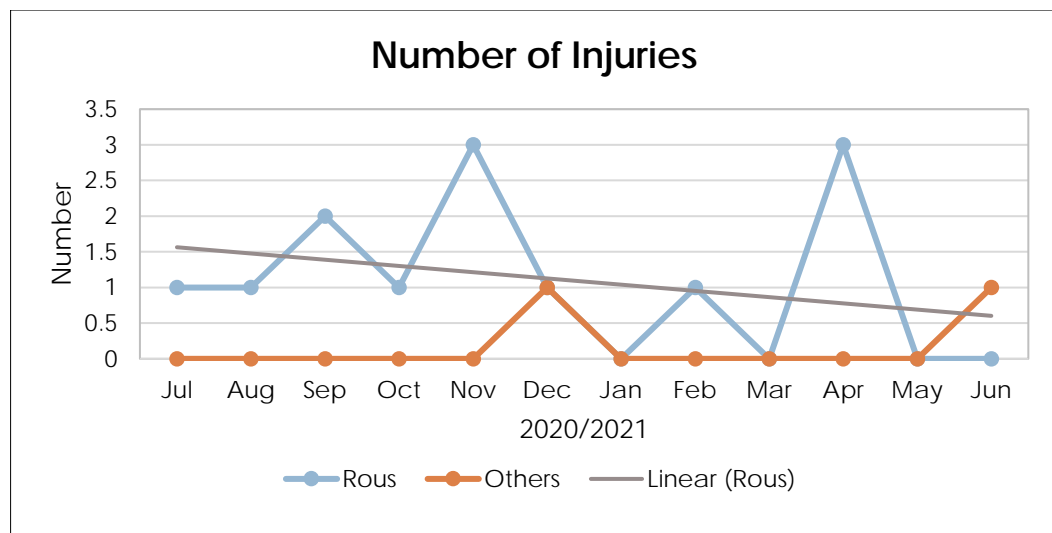
Below is a comparison of WHS reporting numbers used to identify trends within Council. Where there is an increase of numbers compared to previous years Council will investigate the trend to determine if any the course of action is required.

- Seventy-three events were reported during the financial year bringing the monthly average to 6.1 compared to an average of 7.1 events per month for 2019/20.
- Four events reported were from contractors.
- One notifiable injury reported this financial year. Injury occurred to a contractor worker.



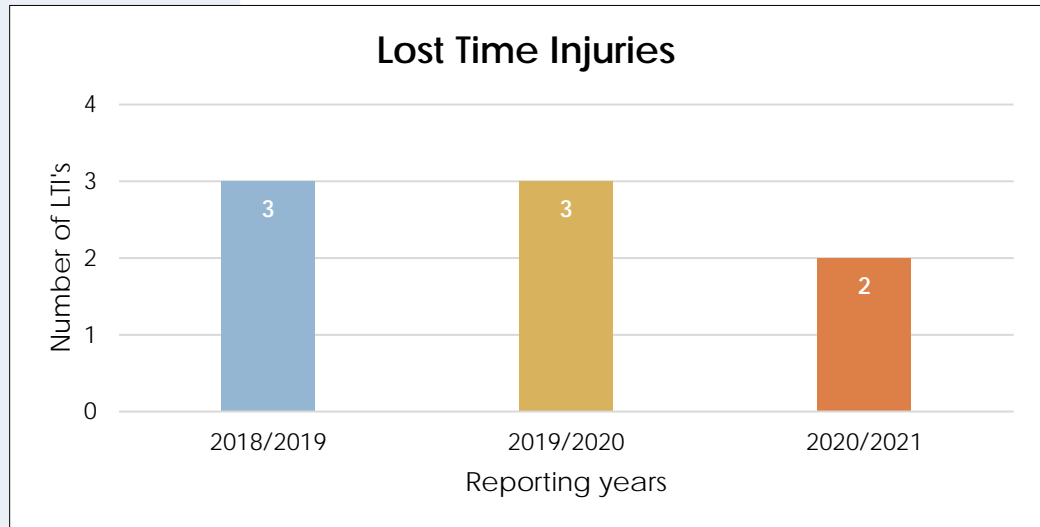
Comment: 73 events were reported during 2020/21, 13 less than the previous year. 2020/21 figures include 4 events reported by contractors. 10 near misses were reported compared to 6 in the previous financial year. Event numbers being down on the previous year is reflective of a lower number of injury and vehicle incidents.

- There were 13 injuries to Council workers during the financial year, three of the injuries resulted in a MTI (medical treatment injury). The average number of injuries per month stands at 1.1 compared to an average of 1.75 per month in 2019/20.

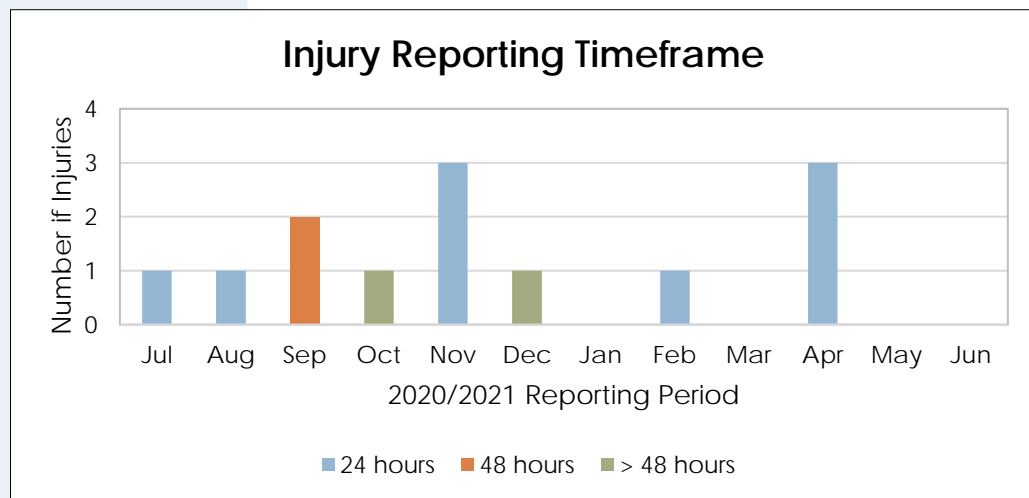


Comment: There were 13 injuries to employees and two to contractors during 2020/21, compared to 21 injuries for the same period in the previous financial year. The monthly average stands at 1, compared an average of 1.7 injuries per month during 2019/20. In the previous year insect bites and stings were a common injury reported. With the introduction of new control measures (clothes wash, personal insecticide and removal techniques) the reported numbers are down showing a positive effect to the total reported numbers of injuries.

- There were two LTIs (lost time injury) for workers during the financial year.

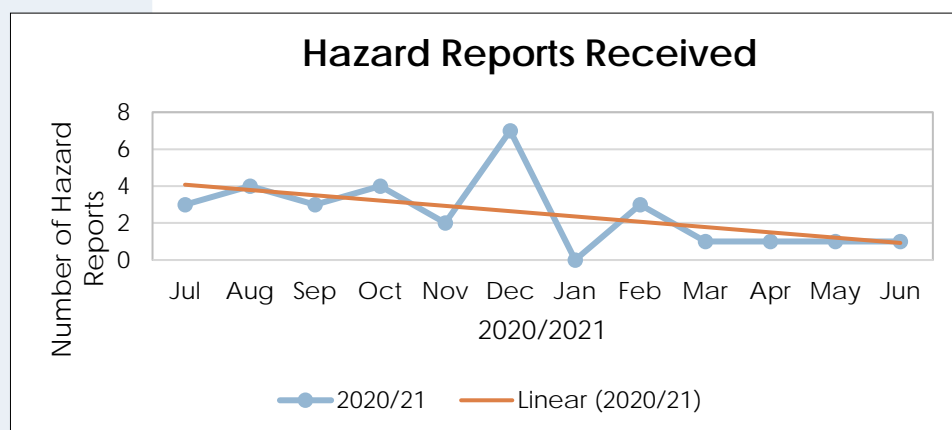


- Of the number of injuries reported in the reporting period, 70% of events were reported within 24 hours (including contractors), compared to 30% in 2019/20.



Comment: 9 of 13 injuries reported within the 24-hour period. A further two within 48 hours and two outside the 48-hour period. One report made 4 days after the occurrence of the injury and the second one seven days after the occurrence. While Council encourages reporting within 24 hours, it is a legislative requirement to report all injuries to our insurers within 48 hours of the event.

- Even with disrupted work patterns, workers continued to identify hazards within the workplace throughout the financial year.



Comment: 30 hazard reports were received during the 2020/21 reporting year compared to 40 for the previous financial year, bringing the monthly average to 2.5 compared to the 2019/20 monthly average of 3.33. COVID19 pandemic restrictions with changed working arrangements including work locations and number of staff (e.g. Blue/Green teams) contributed to lower reported numbers this financial year.

‘Vault’ – field mobility for work health and safety reporting

Rous continues to implement digital systems to support WHS outcomes. Paper based event and incident reporting has been replaced with electronic reporting using ‘Vault’, a digital software solution endorsed by Council’s Workers’ Compensation Insurance Mutual, StateCover.

‘Vault’ is available through a mobile telephone app or desktop portal which means that all staff have access to the system to report events, incidents, hazards, observations and near misses. This has resulted in a process that allows a quicker turnaround of the event from initial reporting to close out.

Continuing from the completion of the event reporting module, several other modules have been activated within ‘Vault’ during the financial year:

- Vault check module is used to maintain first aid kits, conduct working from home assessments, ergonomic assessments, and inspections.
- The contractor management module in Vault is currently being utilised to manage contractors while Council is undertaking the contract/contractor project.
- The plant module of Vault is used to manage the inspection and registration programs of the registered pressure vessels within Council.
- Next planned application in Vault includes the creation of an electronic risk assessment in the Check ‘app’. Two draft assessments have been developed and will be consulted on with staff to check their practicality.
- Risk assessment developed for all new activities.
- A quick assessment based on the current safe work assessment books that workers currently use. Normally used for common or repetitive tasks.

WHS and COVID19

The Emergency Management Team (EMT) with the inclusion of the WHS Officer continues to meet and report back to staff on any new or existing developments. The current situation continues to be monitored including any changes to the current rules made by the State Government that may influence how Rous conducts its daily work activities. Any new legislative changes are amended in Rous's COVID safe plan. Assurance audits of COVID safe plans are regularly undertaken on several sites to ensure compliance with current NSW Health rules.

Check-ins with staff working from home continued during the reporting period focusing especially on the work environment and mental health of the person.

Chemical management

Council has changed electronic programs for the management of hazardous substances. The new program allows for all staff to view manifests and Safety Data Sheets electronically from either their phone, tablet or computer. This removes the need for paper-based documents and provides easy access to the most up-to-date data sheets available. Prior to the change a complete inventory check of all sites was undertaken to confirm what substances were on each site.

Asbestos

The current asbestos register was identified as requiring a review. An audit of Council properties was undertaken, and a new asbestos register created. Audits were conducted on 17 sites including administration, treatment plants, depots, outlying buildings, residential and commercial premises.

Isolated or lone worker

Working alone or in isolation is a risk identified amongst many of the teams. To mitigate the risk, three lone worker apps were trialled with the 'Get Home Safe' app chosen. This app is available to all workers with a mobile phone. As this app works off mobile phone reception, an alternative means had to be sourced to cover the areas out of reception. To cover areas where there is no mobile phone reception, several handheld GPS units with vehicle docks have been purchased and distributed amongst the teams.

WHS training

Rous commenced using SafetyHub in October 2017. SafetyHub is an online WHS training program that provides awareness training on several subjects. Modules are selected on subjects relevant to Council activities and sometimes selected based on a trend appearing through our reporting processes i.e. heat hazards. Further modules are selected based on current climate i.e. COVID and Working from Home or for educational purposes such as understanding safety awareness or understanding risk assessments. Since the inception of the program workers have completed 35 different subject modules at an average of 10 a year. In 2017 modules were sent to 75 workers, in 2021 modules were sent to 98 workers.

WHS audits and inspections

Health, Safety and Environmental audits of the St Helena 600 project are conducted monthly. No major issues were found on site even though hazardous terrain has been encountered (see below photo). A number of smaller issues have been identified and were rectified through adjustments to safety procedures including at team meetings i.e. wearing of PPE.



An audit of WHS related signs was undertaken across all of Council. A total of 370 signs were photographed and logged into Rous's asset system. Sites include:

Four Fluoride plants	Three re-chlorination plants
Rocky Creek dam	Emigrant Creek dam
Whian Whian falls	Two Water Treatment Plants
Four Reservoirs	Three Depots
Administration building	High and Low lift pumps
Eighty-nine pits	

The report considered the location and condition of the sign and determined if any required replacement. It also identified any areas within Council that might require the installation of some form of signage.

Document revision project

Council is continuing to implement the recommendations of the audit of the Work Health and Safety Management System (WHSMS). The system was audited against AS/NZS 4801:2001 and Model WHS Legislation 2011, however Rous is also progressing actions and concurrently aligning its WHSMS with both this standard as well as International Standard ISO 45001: Occupational health and management systems – Requirements with guidance for use.

Safe Work Method Statement (SWMS) – Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) conversion. It was identified that several SWMS were not required as legislation states that SWMS are only required for high-risk activities. An assessment was undertaken with teams as to which current SWMS would remain, what could be converted and any that were obsolete. A total of eighty SWMS needs to be converted into SOPs. Sixty SOPs have been revised.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Human resources activities

Activities during the reporting period focused on continuing the review and implementation of workplace policies and procedures; organisational restructure; and recruitment activities.

There have been several achievements during the reporting period that have improved how we operate, including the implementation of a Human Resource Information System (HRIS), and continuous improvement initiatives to ensure procedures are relevant, appropriate, and current.

A significant activity during the reporting period was the organisational restructure that commenced in May 2021 and concluded after a five-week consultation period on 18 June 2021.

Various internal and external drivers resulted in the need to review Council's structure and resourcing capacity to deliver business needs, these include:

- Results from an internal review of and workplace trial in Customer Service
- Decisions by the governing body in relation to key strategy, namely the Future Water Strategy 2060
- Demand for a more customer focussed, adaptable and contemporary structure for internal service provision
- Learnings from the operation of the structure in place since the 2016 merger, the 2018 organisational changes and opportunities for improved efficiencies, role definition and delineation of duties
- Responding to an increase in regulation, in particular external audit.

The addition of the various activities under the Future Water Project means an increase of approx. \$160M of work (\$250M in total) over the next 10 years. By comparison, without the Future Water Project this was approx. \$90M over the next 10 years. Change is necessary to ensure the business has the capacity and capability to deliver these capital works as well as 'business as usual' activities. The finalisation and adoption of the new organisational restructure is ongoing during this reporting period.

Industrial matters

The Local Government (State) Award 2020 was ratified by the Industrial Relations Commission of NSW on 30 June 2020. A general wage increase of 2% was applied from the first full pay period following 1 July 2020 for all staff in line with the Local Government (State) Award 2020 increases.

The Industrial Relations Commission implemented the Local Government (COVID-19) Splinter (Interim) Award 2021 to assist local governments with industrial matters arising from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. The Splinter Award provided additional operational flexibility, guidance for working from home and leave provisions to encourage employees to get vaccinated against coronavirus.

Industrial matters *(continued)*

The Industrial Relations Commission implemented the Local Government (COVID-19) Splinter (Interim) Award 2021 to assist local governments with industrial matters arising from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. The Splinter Award provided additional operational flexibility, guidance for working from home and leave provisions to encourage employees to get vaccinated against coronavirus. During the reporting period changes were also made to Part B Monetary Rates of the Local Government (Electricians) State Award.

There were no industrial disputes during the reporting period.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) impacts

During the reporting period, COVID-19 restrictions resulted in a change to the 'business as usual' routine of both our indoor and outdoor employees. Council's Emergency Management Team (EMT) observed and rapidly implemented the Public Health Orders (PHOs). The rapid implementation of Working from Home (WFH) for indoor employees, and rearrangement of outdoor teams ensured our work, health and safety obligations were upheld. Despite the rapid changes, there was no disruption to recruitment activity, no job losses, and no employees were stood down during the reporting period.

Business process improvement

The HR team continued to focus on red tape reduction and business process improvement by continuing to implement the recommendations from the Business Process Mapping activity completed in 2019. The focus was improving the process for submission of timesheets and moving from paper-based submission to utilising the workflow function of Council's newly implemented Records Management System to submit and approve timesheets. About 75% of Council employees now submit timesheets via the workflow, which has enabled efficiencies to be gained in payroll processing.

Attrition and recruitment

Council experienced a turnover rate of 11% (permanent employment) during the reporting period. A total of 13 separate recruitment activities were undertaken for 11 permanent positions. Rous also continued efforts to build and attract a diverse workforce through its Disability Inclusion Action Plan.

The implementation of the Onboarding survey over the last 12 months has identified that new employees feel welcomed and supported.

- 100% of new employees were satisfied/very satisfied with the onboarding process.
- 90% of new employees received all necessary information to help them commence.
- 72% of new employees preferred to have the induction content delivered on the first day rather than over the first 1-4 weeks.
- 63% of new employees felt very welcomed to extremely welcomed by their supervisor.
- 63% of new employees felt very welcomed to extremely welcomed by their colleagues.
- 100% of new employees have felt either very supported or extremely supported to undertake the requirements of their role.

Learning and development

Rous has continued its support of staff learning and development, investing nearly \$260K (including course, labour and plant costs) in staff training and professional development activities during the reporting period. Due to the impacts and restrictions of COVID, many training courses requiring face-to-face or practical assessment have been deferred for when restrictions ease. Where appropriate, web-based training has been offered to ensure staff have opportunities for learning and development and remaining up to date with mandatory training that can be provided online.

Health and wellbeing

Council has continued to promote and support health and wellbeing of our employees, with the implementation of the Health and Wellbeing program. Activities completed during the reporting period include a 'Sleep and Fatigue' webinar and the 'Stretch and Move' exercise session. Once all activities have been completed, feedback will inform the following years' program.

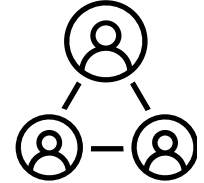
Workforce Management Plan and Succession Plan

During the reporting period Rous focussed on delivery of objectives set out in the third year of the Workforce Management Plan. Rous continued to invest in optimising efficiencies and building and attracting a diverse workforce by implementing the Human Resources Information System (HRIS). The system has allowed efficiencies to be gained in recruitment and onboarding, with the implementation of modules for performance and learning and development to be completed by June 2022.

COMMUNICATIONS

2020/21 social media report

The first phase of the Rous Social Media Framework was completed in May 2020 and saw the implementation of Rous accounts on Facebook and LinkedIn. A Council YouTube page was already in existence. Social media has functioned to communicate Rous activities, engage stakeholders and build Rous's brand as a trusted service provider.



During the reporting period, on average, information has been posted weekly on Facebook and/or LinkedIn. Using a mix of text, images and video, Rous has used social media to inform the community of organisational activity including the development of the Future Water Project 2060 and general water sustainability awareness, to alert the community of new weed incursions and for general weed awareness, to celebrate riparian restoration projects, and advertise new position descriptions to job seekers.

Facebook analytics

In the reporting period, Council's Facebook gained 520 followers. Of these, 94% are in Australia and between the ages of 25 years and 55 years; 60.9% are women and 39.1% are men. Lismore accounts for the majority with 32.7%, followed by Casino with 5.6%, Sydney with 5.4%, Ballina with 3.8%, Alstonville with 3.1% and Byron Bay with 1.7%.

In the reporting period, Council's Facebook content reached 114,250 people. This is the number of people who saw any content from the Page or about the Page. Additionally, paid advertising enabled a further 76,932 people to be reached. Through paid advertising the number of times that ads were on the screen reached 494,300.

There were approximately 110 pieces of content published. The most popular piece of content (based on reach, likes and comments) for the year was a post alerting the community about an outbreak of Parthenium weed. Parthenium is known to cause respiratory and other health issues. The post reached more than 27,800 people and received 294 likes and reactions and 115 comments. It was not a paid ad or promotion.

LinkedIn analytics

The available data in the period between 2 November to 30 June reveals the Rous LinkedIn account gained 245 followers. More than 42% of these people are from New South Wales, with an additional 19% specifically from Sydney. Another nearly 19% are in Brisbane. Around a third of these people are in entry-level positions, another third in senior-level positions and 10% are managers.

LinkedIn analytics *(continued)*

In the same period, the Rous LinkedIn page published approximately 50 pieces of content and received 971 unique visitor views.

Oriented towards business and employment opportunities, industry follower demographics shows the top industry is government administration at 23%, followed by construction at 6.28%, environmental services at 5.86% and information technology at 5%.

Visitor demographics reveal most people, with 16.58%, had job functions in business development, followed by engineering with 14.13%, research with 10.57%, and community and social services, information technology, human resources and sales each at around 8%.

YouTube

Eleven videos were published during the reporting period, with a total 711 views, a total watch time of over 28 hours with the average watch time more than two minutes, and a click through rate (to Rous's website) of 6%: this indicates a notably engaged audience.

A short video explaining the Future Water Project 2060 was the most watched with 164 views, followed by a Rous employee value proposition video, also popular with 134 views in the reporting period with a total 266 views over its lifetime.

Rous's website

Rous's website is an essential source of information for the community and an effective communication tool for all areas of the business. Information that is available on the website includes Council reports and meeting minutes, current dam levels, general business information, career opportunities, online water usage calculators, water saving tips, weed fact sheets, an online weed reporting facility, information on floodplain management issues and information fact sheets, catchment health information, activities and events.

The strategy will be updated at the same frequency as the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework with an Operational Plan reviewed at the beginning of each financial year. A social media framework has also been produced to support the strategy, providing the basis and outline for how Rous uses social media.

EVENTS

PRIMEX 2021

PRIMEX featuring sustainable farming and primary industries was held from Wednesday 20 May to Saturday 22 May 2021. This year's event attracted more than 25,000 visitors.

Rous incorporated ROUS TALKS into our exhibition, featuring presentations on different themes across our business. Patrons were also invited to complete a survey, detailing their knowledge and interest in our services. This was successful with a hundred surveys being completed. The survey results will be used to inform future engagement activities.

Notably, conversations with our community at PRIMEX resulted in the identification of a previously unknown Miconia infestation - a high risk weed for our region and target for our Biosecurity Team.



PRIMEX 2021

Engaging youth and community

Rous participated in school education and community engagement opportunities coinciding with the Green Innovation Awards Mentorship Program and Innovations Day held at Southern Cross University. Staff representing different areas of our business also attended five school immersion activities with the catchment trailer and AV sandpit to engage and educate students around catchment health and water conservation themes.

Big Scrub Rainforest

Given the constraints around public gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic, the 22nd Annual Big Scrub Rainforest Day event presented by Big Scrub Landcare was an online event, which was held on Sunday 20th September 2020. The theme of the event was 'Saving our Rainforests from Fire'.

The feature of this event was the two panel discussions facilitated by well-known ABC journalists Kerry O'Brien and Mick O'Regan. The experienced panels discussed important issues related to the recent bushfires in and around Nightcap National Park. The first panel discussed the impacts of the fires on our rainforests and the lessons learnt. The second panel discussed what strategies and on-ground actions should be pursued and how bushfire management should be improved to minimise the impacts of future major bushfires on our local rainforests. These panel discussions can be viewed at www.bigscrubrainforest.org

Big Scrub Landcare specifically focussed on the recent bushfires in our local area in and around Nightcap National Park, with emphasis on our significant Gondwanan rainforests – rather than fires on a broader regional, state or national scale. These bushfires impacted areas within the western and northern portions of the Rocky Creek Dam water catchment. The event was in response to local community's concerns about the impacts of the recent fires on rainforests and what needs to be done to minimise the impacts of future bushfires. This event generated a lot of attention and participation within our local community and was presented by Big Scrub Landcare and supported by Rous.

'Bugs and Bass' Family Fun Field Day

Boatharbour Landcare Group held its 'Bugs and Bass' Family Fun Field Day on Wilson River at Eltham on Sunday, 28 March 2021. Event supporters included Rous, OzFish, BCF, Friends of the Koala Nursery, Firewheel Nursery, North Coast Canoe Club, Eltham Pantry, Richmond Landcare Inc, Lismore City Council, and NSW Recreational Fishing Trust.

"Saving Boatharbour Bass" is a Landcare project, creating better habitat for native fish by planting the riverbanks of the Wilsons River with local native plants. These plants will bring insects to the riverbank and over the water. Freshwater Bass is a favourite recreational fish species in the Wilson River. Unfortunately, Bass is under threat from loss of habitat and poor water quality issues. Boatharbour Landcare was awarded funds by NSW DPI Fisheries' Recreational Fishing Trust's, Habitat Action Grant program [Department of Primary Industries grants program](#) to help address threats to Wilson River Bass.



'Bugs & Bass' Field Day

A priority for all partners is the control of weeds and stabilising banks with vegetation along the river at Boatharbour and Eltham. The field day was a great opportunity for Landcare, Rous and other partners to meet the community and discuss the Wilsons River, its value and what we can do to protect it.

Leader in Me (LiMe2) program

During the reporting period Rous continued to recognise the sound investment of spreading positive leadership models throughout the organisation. Workplace restrictions and abnormal working conditions caused by COVID19 highlighted the need for continued evolution of traditional leadership roles and Rous addressed this need through its on-going LiMe program. The program provides an opportunity for any person in any area of the business to foster and enhance their leadership skills, creating a pool of leaders not just for Rous but other local government organisations and industries in the region.

During this period the second rendition of Rous's innovative LiMe program (LiMe2) was successfully completed, and the revitalised **LiMe recharge** program has begun.

LiMe2

The twelve-month Rous Leader in Me (LiMe2) Program commenced in October 2019 and concluded in September 2020. The Program started being delivered face to face however was modified from March 2020 – due to COVID 19 restrictions.

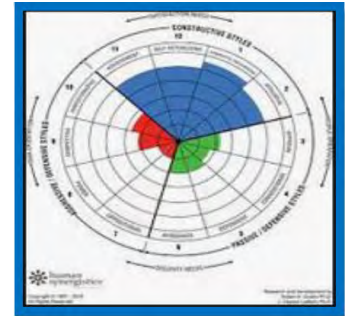
Ten Rous employees applied to participate, and eight participants formed the LiMe2 cohort as selected by the Rous Leadership Team (LT). Maree Gardner, Principal Consultant, Change2020 was the facilitator/coach.



LiMe2 participants meeting virtually during Covid restrictions

The LiMers and their supervisors assessed participants across four leadership elements [Confidence; Connection; Commitment and Courage] – at three checkpoints over the 12-month period.

LiMers improved across three of the four leadership elements with the largest improvement being the Courage element – increasing from 5.1 to 7.6 (out of possible 10). The Connection assessment average decreased slightly from 7.9 to 7.6 however, this may have been impacted by the changes resulting from COVID. The largest improvement, as assessed by the supervisors, was also in the element of courage which indicates not only an increase in self-confidence for participants but also potential benefits to outward effectiveness.



Participant evaluation showing strong constructive leadership styles (blue) and low passive or aggressive styles (red and green)

As part of the LiMe2 program cohort, participants produced an ongoing, staff led recognition program that allowed staff to nominate one another for outstanding performance that reflected core company values (Safety, Teamwork, Accountability and Respect) at any time, this helped engage staff with core values, one another, build teamwork, respect and recognition between departments and ensured all staff were recognised for their efforts and aware of the direction and expectations of Rous as a whole.

As part of the post course assessment of LiMe, all participants then identified different strategies to continue their growth (and return on investment to Rous).

The recognition program was also continued by cohort members and Recharge participants (after its commencement), encouraging participation, collecting nominations, and determining recipients for extra recognition on company-wide platforms.

LiMe Recharge:



Recharge evolved from LiMe into a year-long, needs based program providing previous LiMe participants the opportunity to further improve leadership skills in a more focused and personal manner.

While the original program provided a spread of foundational leadership skills and attitudes throughout the organization, the Recharge sessions focused in on individual needs of eight participants, determining areas of potential improvements in each, with one-on-one workshops, training, and mentoring opportunities to efficiently improve skills that were viewed as having the most positive impact.

A focus on building resilience and handling change reflected not only personal goals over the program, but also the needs of the organization, with the ongoing workplace evolutions presented by COVID19 as well as major departmental changes imminent.

Unfortunately border closures and COVID restrictions did have an impact on planned face to face group activities however this was overcome by successful utilisation of online communication platforms and allowed for more one on one targeted sessions.



By taking a more personal approach participants have been able to seek support in real life day to day activities such as coaching through the ongoing difficulties of teams working across remote workstations during COVID, mentoring personnel to encourage better outcomes to major departmental changes or acting out difficult situations or conversations prior to the event to promote the best possible outcome for all involved while limiting stress on staff.

Throughout the program members of the leadership team championed a more open and collaborative workspace by sharing their own strategies for dealing with change and building personal resilience and participants were encouraged to share not only their own management strategies but also areas in which they required assistance.

Mentoring continued to provide staff with appropriate coping strategies and assistance as required and opened-up strong dialogue and connections between staff. The Lime Re-charge participants have also continued to be a conduit between the Leadership Team and ground staff, encouraging a culture of two-way communication. As the Leadership Team has taken an active role in the coaching and mentoring sessions, opportunities for feedback to flow freely in both directions have arisen in a positive environment that would otherwise not occur, allowing (not only staff involved but others within members areas of influence) access to information, guidance, and influence in the decision-making process, garnering better results for all involved.

With a solid support network supplied by previous LiMe programs, participants have been provided with the confidence and encouragement to step up into areas traditionally outside their comfort zone and positional requirements. Rechargers have helped shape future organisational strategies through effective communication across all levels of the company, been involved in major strategic reviews of infrastructure management plans allowing opportunities to both learn and lead, helped to embed change by encouraging positive acceptance of and mentoring other staff through inevitable changes that would have been viewed in a negative light by staff affected and have been able to seek direct assistance navigating what would have otherwise been some extremely difficult circumstances.

As part of the program external actors were engaged by Change 2020 consultants to work through scenario-based role play allowing participants to act out hard to navigate conversations in a controlled environment receiving feedback and direction along the way. These scenarios were chosen by staff to reflect real life situations and discussions that needed to be carried out, but which may not have otherwise been successful. Examples included dealing with difficult staff members, introducing unwanted but necessary changes to workflows and tasks, or communicating with confrontational customers.

Overall, the Leader in Me program continues to build resilience throughout the organisation by not only encouraging the growth of individual leaders but by creating a support network for all staff, helping foster an environment accepting of ongoing change, to better deal with upcoming organisational challenges and the day-to-day stresses exacerbated by COVID19.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

Rous's financial performance is aligned with its continued focus on long-term financial sustainability. Quarterly reviews of the Operational Plan and its financial performance are monitored and adjusted to the changing conditions and requirements identified throughout the year. The Long-Term Financial Plan is reviewed annually to ensure short-term needs are considered against long-term sustainability. As a result, Rous remains in a strong financial position with cash and investments at satisfactory levels to ensure that all current liabilities can be met when due.

The financial position remains strong with a net surplus result of \$4.3 million (2020: \$2.3 million) and included depreciation expense of \$6.7 million (2020: \$7.3 million). Overall income has increased by \$412,000 compared to the previous year. Most of the increase can be attributed to additional developer contribution payments compared to the previous year.

During the 2020/21 year, Rous had the opportunity to access favourable borrowing rates from NSW Treasury (TCorp) for Future Water Strategy projects. Council's Investment policy approach was updated to a more conservative investment strategy in line with TCorp investment guidelines. These conservative investments generally yield a lower return, however given the current economic market and consistently low interest rates, it was determined there will be minimal impact on returns. Over the past 12 months Council has achieved an average ethical investment percentage of 54.74% of the total portfolio. Overall investment return for the year was 1.15%. The result achieved is consistent with Council's strong investment performance despite difficult market conditions. Council continues to outperform the bank bill swap rate (BBSW) which had an annual result of 0.05%.

Council's overall financial position improved during the past 12 months with total equity increasing by \$7.386 million.

Summary of financial report for the year ended 30 June 2021

	2020/21 \$'000	2019/20 \$'000
Income statement		
Total income from continuing operations	30,575	30,163
Total expenses from continuing operations	26,251	27,779
Operating result from continuing operations	4,324	2,384
Gain on local government amalgamation	-	-
Net operating result for the year	2,384	2,384
Net operating result before grants and contributions provided for capital purpose	(911)	(2,027)

	2020/21 \$'000	2019/20 \$'000
Balance sheet		
Total current assets	52,077	38,305
Total current liabilities	9,372	7,552
Total non-current assets	497,086	498,565
Total non-current liabilities	38,420	19,226
Total equity	514,278	510,092
Other financial information		
Unrestricted current ratio	7.03 : 1	5.24 : 1
Operating performance ratio	(4.92%)	(8.08%)
Building and infrastructure renewals ratio	1.00 : 1	0.93 : 1
Debt service ratio	1.59 : 1	1.54 : 1

Non-core business activity

Rous continues to review its non-core business activities to assess their relevance to future operations. These reviews established performance benchmarks and strategic objectives in ensuring that our operations in non-core activities are financially advantageous to core water supply operations.

Commercial properties

Rous owns two commercial properties in the Lismore CBD which are leased to business entities to obtain a commercial return. This property portfolio is regularly reviewed to ensure returns are optimised and are making a positive contribution to revenue overall. Rous also continues to explore market opportunities to dispose of part of its investment property portfolio.

In addition, Rous is the head lessee of the Rous County Council Administration Centre, 218-232 Molesworth Street, which accommodates a number of staff, as well as providing commercial leasing revenue from non-Council occupied space.

Procurement and properties

The Procurement and Properties team continues its focus on best practice and continuous improvement in the procurement, properties, fleet and stores activities of Rous. Internal service delivery is a core function, providing support at various stages of the procurement cycle, as well as directly managing Rous properties including Kyogle Street, Wyrallah Road and Trustum's Hill Road Depots, and coordinating stores and fleet operations.

Richmond Water Laboratories

The 2020/21 year saw Richmond Water Laboratories (RWL) sales volume reduce mainly due to COVID border restrictions and drought conditions easing. As a result, forecasted profit was unable to be achieved. After 20 years of greatly appreciated service, the Laboratory Manager resigned in April 2021 and a Business Manager was appointed to review and improve RWL sales, operations, staffing and plans for 2021/22.

For 2021/22, annual NATA reaccreditation has recently been completed, providing customers with ongoing assurance of industry best practice and integrity of results, while solutions have been found to enable the Lab to service all customers under COVID restrictions. Sales are now growing at above budget as an agreed business plan is being implemented. In particular, improving customer relationships with constituent councils is a goal for the coming year to increase sales and help achieve Rous's Mission Statement.

Perradenya Estate

Perradenya Estate is a low-impact residential housing development situated in the Caniaba area, close to the City of Lismore. It has been designed as an ecologically sustainable development with energy and water efficiency, healthy housing and facilities.

On completion, Perradenya will consist of up to 160 residential dwellings and a small commercial centre. The vision for the Estate is that it will connect to education and employment centres through upgraded and extended public transport services.

Release 5, Stage 2 (15 lots) contracts for sale were completed within the first quarter of 2019. Engineering designs and approvals were finalised for Release 6 (20 lots) with encouraging signs of strong demand for the new lots. Rous issued tender documents to the market for civil construction in June 2019.



Perradenya Release 6

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

With the ongoing pandemic driving business decisions, giving Rous staff more flexible and mobile solutions has been a key priority in 2020/21. Improvements in security, remote access solutions and capability through the rapidly increased use of Laptops and Tablet hardware, particularly in the field, have all been made over the year.

Secondly, and as important, Rous Cybersecurity enhancement has been a focus. ICT at Rous have delivered multiple enhancements to Cybersecurity capability, both technical and in policy/process and this has driven a higher degree of awareness of what good Cybersecurity practices are across all staff.



Highlights for 2020/21

During the financial year, the following significant projects were completed.

- Implemented a comprehensive Electronic Document and Records Management System, replacing a manual paper-based system.
- Further improvements to the mobility of Council staff with the rollout of a fleet of new laptops, enabling further opportunities for flexible work arrangements.
- Significant improvements and automation to Information Management processes.
- Introduction of Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) across Council to strengthen Cybersecurity.
- Delivered further high-speed internet links to our Depots via the NBN, providing Council greater Disaster Recovery options and capability.

Reconciliation Action Plan

Rous continued the process of reconciliation between Rous and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through the endorsement of a Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) at Rous's April 2021 meeting. The Plan was formally accredited by Reconciliation Australia in September 2021.

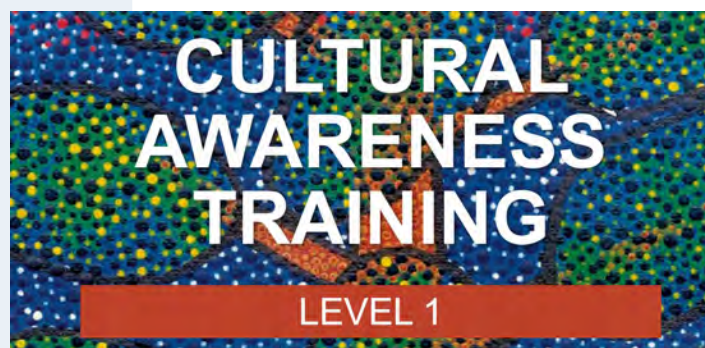
RAPs are practical plans of action built on relationships and respect which create positive social change and economic opportunities for indigenous people in our local communities.

Key highlights for the year were:

- Support and participation in Close the Gap and NAIDOC week activities in conjunction with local communities recognising the impact Covid-19 had on these events and therefore the need for virtual attendance in most cases
- Key support partner for NORPA production "Flow"



- Launch of Rous's *Cultural Awareness Training*



- Rous staff participation in Reconciliation Australia's 'Workplace RAP Barometer' survey.

STATUTORY REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Audited financial reports - section 428(4)(a)

Rous's audited financial reports: [Annual Financial Statements y.e. 30 June 2021](#)

Asset reporting - section 406(2) (refer Planning and Reporting manual requirement)

In accordance with the requirements of the *Local Government Act 1993* and the *Local Government (General) Regulation 2021*, the NSW Local Government Code of Accounting Practice and Financial Reporting and the Australian Accounting Standards:

Assets to the value of \$11.315 million were acquired by Rous during the reporting period, bringing total assets held as at 30 June 2021 to the value of \$497.08 million (refer to page 30 of the audited financial reports 2020/21 (refer to link above).

Rous's report on the condition of public works, is available on page 3 – Special Schedules 2021 of the audited financial reports 2020/2021 (refer to link above).

Rates and charges written-off – Reg.132

There was \$16,945.54 rates and charges written-off for the reporting period.

Regional State of the Environment report - section 428A

Preparation of the Regional State of the Environment report was funded by general and county councils of the north coast region of NSW and North Coast Local Land Services. The report assesses both local and regional environmental states using a set of indicators and measures specifically designed for the region and remains in place for four years. The report allows participating councils to make informed decisions on environmental objectives and is a guide for both local and regional environmental planning and resourcing. It also informs the State on regional environment conditions. A copy of the report is available on our [website](#).

The Regional State of Environment report has three main goals:

- To provide information to the community and decision-makers on the condition of the local environment and where resources are best placed to respond to community expectations;
- To better align with State natural resource management reporting; and
- To meet the reporting requirements of the *Local Government Act 1993*.



STATUTORY REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Legal proceedings - section 428(4)(b) and Reg. 217(1)(a3)

Rous incurred \$3,638 in relation to legal proceedings during the reporting period.

Councillor induction training and professional development Reg. 186

- a) There were no induction training programs or refreshers in 2020/21.
- b) The following Councillors participated in ongoing professional development:

Participants	Name of program
Cr Williams	2020 Local Government NSW Conference November 2020
Cr Ekins	Flood Management Australia National Conference May 2021
Cr Cook	Local Government Water Forum July 2020
Cr Cook	Local Government Water Management Conference Sep 2020
Cr Cook	Executive certificate for elected members LG NSW Sep 2020

- c) There were no seminars, circulars and other activities delivered as part of the ongoing professional development program

Councillors: fees and expenses - section 428(4)(b) and Reg. 217(1)(a1)

The following fees and expenses were incurred by councillors in accordance with the policy 'Payment of Expenses and Provision of Facilities for Chairperson and Councillors'. Copy of policy available on our website: [policy](#)

Member fees and expenses: expenditure		01/07/20 - 30/06/21
Chair fees		\$16,660
Member fees and travel reimbursed		\$82,828
	Total	\$99,488
	Budget allocation	\$107,400

STATUTORY REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Dedicated office equipment allocated to councillors on a personal basis.	cl 217(1)(a1)(i)	0
Telephone calls made by councillors.	cl 217(1)(a1)(ii)	0
Councillor attendance at conferences and seminars (includes airfares, registrations, meals and accommodation).	cl 217(1)(a1)(iii)	\$3,832
Training of councillors and provision of skill development for councillors.	cl 217(1)(a1)(iv)	\$1,750
Interstate visits undertaken during the year by councillors while representing the council, including the cost of transport, the cost of accommodation and other out-of-pocket travelling expenses.	cl 217(1)(a1)(v)	0
Overseas visits undertaken during the year by councillors while representing the council, including the cost of transport, the cost of accommodation and other out-of-pocket travelling expenses.	cl 217(1)(a1)(vi)	0
Expenses of any spouse, partner (whether of the same or the opposite sex) or other person who accompanied a councillor in the performance of his or her civic functions, being expenses payable in accordance with the <i>Guidelines for the Payment of Expenses and the Provision of Facilities for Mayors and Councillors for Local Councils in NSW</i> prepared by the Director-General from time to time.	cl 217(1)(a1)(vii)	0
Expenses involved in the provision of care for a child of, or an immediate family member of, a councillor, to allow the councillor to undertake his or her civic functions.	cl 217(1)(a1)(viii)	0
	Total	\$5,582
	Budget allocation	\$56,000

Additional information for inclusion in annual report - section 428(4)(b) and Reg. 217(1)(a)

During 2020/21, no overseas visits were made by councillors, Council staff or other persons while representing Council.

STATUTORY REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Senior staff - section 428(4)(b) and Reg. 217(1)(b)(i-v)

Under the Local Government Act 1993 Rous is required to appoint and employ a person under a performance-based contract to be its general manager. The General Manager is the only senior staff person employed by Rous. The total amount payable to the General Manager during the reporting period was:

Total value of the salary component of the package	\$243,811.20
Total amount of any bonus payments, performance payments or other payments made to the general manager that do not form part of the salary component of the general manager	-
Total amount payable by council by way of the employer's contribution or salary sacrifice to any superannuation scheme to which the general manager may be a contributor	\$24,188.80
Total value of any non-cash benefits for which the general manager may elect under the package	-
Total amount payable by council by way of fringe benefits tax for any such non-cash benefits	-
Total	\$268,000.00

Contracts awarded for amounts greater than \$150,000 - section 428(4)(b) and Reg. 217(1)(a2)

- St Helena Trunk Main Augmentation: Stage 2 construction of 8km pipeline was let to Ledonne Constructions Pty Ltd for \$12,893,395 (incl GST).
- Strategic review for future upgrades and operations of the Nightcap Water Treatment Plant was let to Hunter H2O Holdings Pty Ltd. For \$169,097.50 (incl GST).
- Permanent and temporary placements and associated services contract for \$198,928.16 with NORTEC Employment & Training for engineering personnel.

Private works - section 67 and Reg. 217(1)(a4)

Rous did not undertake any works on private land during the reporting period. Therefore, no resolutions pursuant to section 67 of the Local Government Act 1993 were required.

STATUTORY REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Contributions under section 356 - section 428(4)(b) and Reg. 217(1)(a5)

Contributions of \$17,840 were made under section 356 in accordance with Council's 'Retail Customer Water Account Assistance' policy.

Activities to Implement EEO Management Plan - Sections 428(4)(B) and Reg. 217(1)(A9)

It is Council's commitment to ensure our workplace is free of discrimination and supports a diverse workforce. To provide equal opportunity in employment for all persons in accordance with relevant State and Commonwealth legislation, Council's EEO policy sets out the following strategies:

- *Policies and procedures:* Review and development of policies and procedures are assessed against EEO objectives.
- *Communication:* Rous's values are proactively promoted and enforced through business practices.
- *Recruitment and selection:* EEO objectives are integrated within our 'Recruitment' procedure.
- *Training and development:* EEO principles are embedded into staff training and development. Refresher training is provided to staff periodically on EEO policy and principles.
- *Career planning:* Recruitment, appointment and promotion and training opportunities are monitored to ensure EEO principles are adhered to.
- *Grievance handling:* Grievance resolution procedures are promoted to all staff. Relevant staff are trained in grievance resolution procedures and refresher harassment and bullying training provided to all staff.

Through staff training and awareness, policy development and implementation, key messaging has been provided to reinforce Rous's strong position against discrimination and harassment in any form.

External bodies - section 428(4)(b) and Reg. 217(1)(a6)

Rous has not delegated any of its functions to external bodies.

Controlling interests in companies - section 428(4)(b) and Reg. 217(1)(a7)

Council does not hold a controlling interest in any companies.

STATUTORY REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Partnerships, cooperatives and joint ventures - section 428(4)(b) and Reg. 217(1)(a8)

During the reporting period Rous was a party to the following arrangements:

- Statewide Mutual

A self-insurance pool covering public liability and professional indemnity insurance as well as providing risk management advice.

- StateCover

A self-insurance pool providing cover for workers' compensation insurance as well as providing advice on work health and safety matters.

Disability Inclusion Act 2014 - section 13(1)

The implementation of Council's [Disability Inclusion Action Plan](#) is included in the Delivery program | Operational plan of Council's Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework.

Achievements in delivering the various actions for 2020/21 are provided at [IP&R Delivery program- Operational Plan achievements](#)

Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 - sections 125 & 7

Following is a copy of Rous's Government Information (Public Access) ('GIPA') annual report to the NSW Ombudsman's office:

Agency name	Rous County Council
Reporting period	1 July 2020 – 30 June 2021

Clause 8A: Details of the review carried out by the agency under section 7 (3) of the Act during the reporting year and the details of any information made publicly available by the agency as a result of the review:

	Reviews carried out by agency	Information made publicly available by the agency
8(a)	Yes	Yes

The open access information and proactively released information made available during the relevant reporting period on Council's website was reviewed. The following are examples of new information of public interest which were proactively released:

STATUTORY REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

+ Council report and minutes + Media releases + Updated policies + Updated contracts register + Updated job applicant information package + IP&R Framework + Annual Report + Annual Financial and Audit Reports + Summary of financial statements + Disclosure of Interest returns + Statewide JLT councillors liability + Weed fact sheets + Weekly pesticide notifications (when spraying done) + Annual Summary of Drinking Water Quality + Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) July 2021 - July 2023 + Rocky Creek Dam non-market value study of tourism and recreational services + Sustainable water case study Southern Cross University + Saltwater Creek Scoping Plan for Active Floodgate Management + Seelims Canal Active Floodgate Management Plan + Keith Hall Active Floodgate Management Plan + North Woodburn Kilgin Drain Active Floodgate Management Plan + Campbells Drain Active Floodgate Management Plan + Montis Creek Active Floodgate Management Plan + Technical note - Blackwater Australian Research Council Project + Savings from Residential Rainwater Tanks on the NSW Far North Coast + Future Water Project 2060 Community Summary brochure + Future Water Project 2060 brochure + Bulk Water Supply Demand Management Forecast 2020-2060 + Future Water Project 2060 Integrated Water Cycle Management (IWCM) public exhibition document + IWCM Strategy timeline to adoption Future Water Project submissions (redacted) + Water for livestock -Interpreting water quality tests + Bush Regeneration Areas Private Land Landscape + Interactive land register/map.

Clause 8B: The total number of access applications received by the agency during the reporting year (including withdrawn applications but not including invalid applications).

	Total number of applications received
8(b)	2

Clause 8C: The total number of access applications received by the agency during the reporting year that the agency refused either wholly or partly, because the application was for the disclosure of information referred to in Schedule 1 to the Act (information for which there is conclusive presumption of overriding public interest against disclosure).

Number of applications refused	Wholly	Partly	Total
	0	0	0
% of total	0%	0%	

STATUTORY REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Schedule 2 Statistical information about access applications to be included in annual report

Table A: Number of applications by type of applicant and outcome*										
	Access granted in full	Access granted in part	Access refused in full	Information not held	Information	Refuse to deal	Refuse to confirm/	Application withdrawn	Total	% of total
Media	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Members of Parliament	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Private sector business	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Not for profit organisations or community groups	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50%
Members of the public (application by legal representative)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Members of the public (other)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50%
Total	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	
% of total	50%	50%	0	0	0	0	0	0		

*More than one decision can be made in respect of a particular access application. If so, a recording must be made in relation to each such decision. This also applies to Table B.

Table B: Number of applications by type of applicant and outcome										
	Access granted in full	Access granted in part	Access refused in full	Information not held	Information	Refuse to deal with	Refuse to confirm/ deny	Application withdrawn	Total	% of total
Personal information applications	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Access applications (other than personal information applications)	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	100%

Access applications that are partly personal information applications and partly other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
% of total	50%	50%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	

A *personal information application* is an access application for personal information (as defined in clause 4 of Schedule 4 to the Act) about the applicant (the applicant being an individual).

Table C: Invalid applications

Reason for invalidity	Number of applications	% of total
Application does not comply with formal requirements (section 41 of the Act)	2	100%
Application is for excluded information of the agency (section 43 of the Act)	0	0
Application contravenes restraint order (section 110 of the Act)	0	0
Total number of invalid applications received	2	100%
Invalid applications that subsequently became valid applications	2	100%

Table D: Conclusive presumption of overriding public interest against disclosure: matters listed in Schedule 1 to Act

	Number of times consideration used*	% of total
Overriding secrecy laws	0	0
Cabinet information	0	0
Executive Council information	0	0
Contempt	0	0
Legal professional privilege	0	0
Excluded information	0	0
Documents affecting law enforcement and public safety	0	0
Transport safety	0	0
Adoption	0	0
Care and protection of children	0	0
Ministerial code of conduct	0	0
Aboriginal and environmental heritage	0	0
Privilege generally - Sch 1(5A)	0	0
Information provided to High-Risk Offenders Assessment Committee	0	0
Total	0	

* More than one public interest consideration may apply in relation to a particular access application and, if so, each such consideration is to be recorded (but only once per application). this also applies in relation to Tab.

Table E: Other public interest considerations against disclosure: matters listed in table to S.14 of Act		
	Number of times consideration used	% of total
Responsible and effective government	3	43%
Law enforcement and security	0	0
Individual rights, judicial processes and natural justice	2	29%
Business interests of agencies and other persons	0	0
Environment, culture, economy and general matters	2	29%
Secrecy provisions	0	0
Exempt documents under interstate Freedom of Information legislation	0	0
Total	7	

Table F: Timeliness		
	Number of applications	% of total
Decided within the statutory timeframe (20 days plus any extensions)	1	50%
Decided after 35 days (by agreement with applicant)	0	0
Not decided within time (deemed refusal)	1*	50%
Total	2	

*Late decision made – refer to section 63(2) *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (NSW)*

Table G: Number of applications reviewed under Part 5 of the Act (by type of review and outcome)				
	Decision varied	Decision upheld	Total	% of total
Internal review	0	1	1	100%
Review by Information Commissioner*	0	0	0	0
Internal review following recommendation under section 93 of Act	0	0	0	0
Review by NCAT	0	0	0	0
Total	0	1	1	
% of total	0	100%		

*The Information Commissioner does not have the authority to vary decisions but can make recommendation to the original decision-maker. The data in this case indicates that a recommendation to vary or uphold the original decision has been made by the Information Commissioner.

Table H: Applications for review under Part 5 of the Act (by type of applicant)

	Number of applications for review	% of total
Applications by access applicants	1	50%
Applications by persons to whom information the subject of access application relates (see section 54 of the Act)	1	50%
Total	2	

Table I: Applications transferred to other agencies

	Number of applications transferred	% of total
Agency-initiated transfers	0	0
Applicant-initiated transfers	0	0
Total	0	

Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 - section 7.5

Constituent councils are the relevant planning authority for their local government areas and as such, Rous has no function in reporting on planning agreements.

Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 - section 33

Rous adopted its 'Privacy Management' policy in 2015. The policy is based on the Model Privacy Management Plan for local government. No reviews were conducted during the reporting period by or on behalf of Rous under Part 5 of the Act.

Public Interest Disclosures Act 1994 - section 31

Following is a summary of Rous's Public Interest Disclosures ('PID') annual report to the NSW Ombudsman:

Reporting period: 1 July 2020 – 30 June 2021			
	Made by public officials performing day-to-day functions	Under a statutory or other legal obligation	All other PIDs
Number of public officials who made PIDs directly	0	0	0
Number of PIDs received	0	0	0
Of PIDs received, number primarily about:			
- Corrupt conduct	0	0	0
- Maladministration	0	0	0
- Serious and substantial waste	0	0	0
- Government information contravention	0	0	0
- Local government pecuniary interest contravention	0	0	0
Number of PIDs finalised	0	0	0

Rous has in place an internal reporting policy [Public Interest Disclosures policy](#). The General Manager has taken action to meet staff awareness obligations by implementing a range of measures such as: Incorporating awareness training into Council's Employee Induction Program; making available public Interest Disclosure (PID) Information on the internal staff intranet and electronic document management system; and ensuring all Council worksites display the NSW Ombudsman supplied posters with details of who a PID may be made to.