

Issue

The Coffs Harbour Branch of the NSW Farmers' Association has delivered an extremely effective campaign in opposition to Council's proposal to rezone farm land for conservation. As a result of this campaign, Coffs Harbour City Council has agreed to completely redraft its zoning proposal before re-releasing it for public consultation.

This case study provides an account of how Members can influence local government planning policy and ensure that rights and needs of the farm sector are given fair consideration in the LEP process. Any Member interested in discussing how the Coffs Harbour Branch carried out this campaign can contact the Association's local Regional Membership Coordinator, Michael Burt on 02 6564 2355 to discuss.

Background

The Coffs Harbour draft Priority Habitats and Corridors Strategy ('PHCS') was put up for consultation in early 2010. Very little information was provided to affected landholders and very few public consultations were organised to explain the strategy to the community.

Particular concerns regarding the draft Coffs Harbour PCHS included:

- The intention to increase riparian zones from 20m to 50m; and
- New environmental categories imposed on farm land, including High Conservation Lands, and Environmental rehabilitation and restoration categories.

If implemented in the LEP these measures would have significantly impacted on future landuse practices and property values of Members.

Members found that when they raised concerns with Council, they were often given dismissive answers that did not address their issues. In response to this, the Coffs Harbour Branch decided to implement a coordinated grassroots campaign. Working closely with their Regional Membership Coordinator, and with technical and policy support from NSW Farmers' Association Head Office, the Branch successfully mobilised Members and local landholders to protest against the Council's proposal.

Actions Taken

Some of the key actions taken by the Coffs Harbour Branch included:

- Raising awareness in the local community – spreading the word
- Writing to the Council to request an extension on the consultation process on the basis that inadequate consultation had occurred. An extension of 4 weeks was granted, allowing Members to fully outline their concerns.
- Taking every opportunity to advertise the draft strategy including how it would affect landholders and seeking submissions from all concerned landholders. 490 submissions were eventually received.
- Actively seeking increased engagement from the Council in the form of public meetings to discuss the proposal. Originally, very limited consultation was planned.

Outcome

As a result of the extensive and overwhelming response from concerned landholders, the Coffs Harbour Shire Council agreed to redraft the PCHS before embarking on a second round of public consultations to ensure the views of all are adequately heard. While pressure will need to be maintained to secure a good outcome, this was a significant achievement for the Coffs Harbour Branch. The Coffs harbour action is an excellent example of how District Councillors, local members and Association staff are working together to deliver effective grass roots campaigns in defence of farmers property rights.