AQUATIC PLANT MANAGEMENT POLICY

Responsible Department:	Planning and Sustainability
Responsible Section:	Regulatory Compliance
Responsible Officer:	Manager Regulatory Compliance

Objective

To provide a framework for coordinated management of aquatic plants situated on Council managed land, including:

- Stormwater infrastructure;
- Parks and open spaces;
- Reserves;
- Community Land;

To reduce the impacts of aquatic plants on water quality, biodiversity, and infrastructure, and to achieve high quality water bodies that require minimal resource input and improved environmental and social benefits.

Introduction

Aquatic plants are managed in compliance with relevant legislation to maintain the health of the existing aquatic environment while managing risk to people, property, and infrastructure. Council's management approach will be based on risk assessment and contribute to the long-term enhancement and improvement of ecological, economic, and social benefits.

Policy

1. Definitions

Term	Definition
NSW DPI Jurisdiction	NSW DPI has jurisdiction over all fish and marine vegetation in State waters. This includes permanent and intermittent freshwater areas and 'water land' below the highest astronomical tide in tidal areas, extending to three nautical miles offshore (or beyond where other legislative powers of the State apply). 'Water land' is defined under the Fisheries Management Act as land submerged by water, whether permanently or intermittently or whether forming an artificial or natural body of water and includes wetlands and any other land prescribed by the regulations as water land.
Native vegetation	Plants that are indigenous to NSW including trees, understory plants, herbs including groundcovers, plants occurring in a wetland, and grasses that existed in the State prior to European settlement.
Ecological restoration	Aims to restore pre-existing indigenous ecosystems and ecological processes, maintaining and developing the capacity of a natural system to self-perpetuate.
Resilience	Refers to the ability of an ecosystem to regenerate naturally and to withstand, or recover from, disturbances such as weed invasion, clearing, or fire.

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Term	Definition
Natural Ecosystem	Natural ecosystems are communities of biotic and abiotic components in oceans, rivers and on land in which the components interact to form complex food webs, nutrient cycles, and energy flows. The term 'ecosystem' describes an ecological community of any size or scale.
Management Zone	Management zones are areas that require different levels of management intervention or different restoration actions at different times. These actions can include maintenance and repair, measures to minimize impacts to flora and fauna during restoration works.
Weeds	Weeds includes plants categorised as environmental weeds, agricultural weeds, Weeds of National Significance (WoNS) and National Environmental Alert List weeds by the NSW Government in accordance with the *Biosecurity Act 2015* (NSW). In NSW all plants are regulated with a general biosecurity duty to prevent, eliminate or minimise any biosecurity risk they may pose.

2. Authorities and Responsibilities

2.1. Council will assess a request for the removal of aquatic plants on Council managed water ways in accordance with this Policy.
2.2. The General Manager, or their delegate, has authority to authorise the removal of aquatic plants in accordance with this Policy.

3. Benefits of Aquatic Plants

3.1. Aquatic plants have multiple uses in a water system contributing to the overall health of the aquatic environment as well as providing a pleasing aesthetic outlook. Removal of these plants may result in destroying water quality and habitat with no real benefit.
3.2. Aquatic plants rely on water quality and environmental inputs for their growth and health. When water becomes rich in nutrients aquatic plants can grow vigorously to a point where they become a nuisance and are considered a weed.
3.3. Managing aquatic plants in existing water bodies is closely linked to planning, design, and improvement of stormwater management.

4. Management Principles

4.1. Aquatic plants should only be controlled when they interfere with the use of a particular aquatic environment or when there is a statutory obligation.
4.2. Assessment of the plants ecology and the problem it poses will be completed before taking action to ensure the most cost-effective and environmentally sound control techniques are used.
4.3. Assessment will include:

(a) The source of the plant;
(b) The reason it poses a problem;
(c) The use made of the waterway;
(d) The management options available; and
(e) The ongoing costs and benefits of the management options.

5. Criteria for Assessment of Aquatic Plant Removal

5.1. It is Council's policy not to remove non-declared or non-impacting aquatic plants. All possible solutions and management options will be explored to resolve the source of the problem rather than the removal of the aquatic plants.
5.2. Council's policy is to avoid the removal of aquatic plants except when they:

(a) Blanket the entire water surface, causing oxygen depletion which could in turn destroy the under surface ecosystem and kill aquatic species;
(b) As introduced species, compete with native species and reduce biodiversity;
(c) Impact on the aquatic habitat of bird species and cause them to relocate;
(d) Impede stormwater flows and consequently place property at risk;
(e) Interfere with commercial and recreational activities;
(f) Cause blockages or impede water intake to pumping equipment;
(g) Contaminate and taint drinking water supplies;
(h) Cause pungent odours; or
(i) Accumulate debris.

6. Aquatic Plant Removal Requests by Residents

6.1. Requests from residents for removal of aquatic plants will be received by Council via a fully completed Application *Form - Request for Council Management of Aquatic Plants*.
6.2. A response acknowledging receipt of the application will be sent within five (5) business days of the request being received.
6.3. Correctly completed requests will be assessed within 30 business days of receipt of the application notifying:

(a) Approval of the request, advice if State and/or National permits are required, and the proposed timeframe for necessary permits and works; or
(b) Reasons for denial of the request, citing the relevant sections of this policy and/or relevant legislation.

6.4. If the request cannot be assessed within 30 days, the applicant will be notified in writing as soon as practical of additional information required for assessment of the application, and/or additional time required for assessment of the application, and an explanation as to the reasons for the additional information/time required. An alternative timeframe will be provided to the applicant for completion of the assessment of the request.

7. Options for Managing Aquatic Plants

7.1. Managing aquatic plants successfully depends on the budget and resources available, the assessment of the plants as outlined previously in this policy, and the ability to carry out effective control methods.
7.2. Control methods can include one or a combination of the methods outlined below:

(a) Prevention

(i) Council will actively engage in prevention measures including monitoring and early detection of new infestations; the use of booms and fences to prevent spread; hygienic practices when moving boats, trailers, and watercraft from one water body to another; and proper management of a water body and uses of its surrounding land to minimise nutrient loads and disturbances to banks and riparian vegetation.

(b) Monitoring and Early Intervention

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(i) Council will regularly inspect water bodies at risk of infestation by aquatic plants. Inspections will increase up to once per week during the warmer months when growth is at its peak.

(ii) Council will control identified small infestations before the plants have reached a mature stage, when their mass can make removal difficult. Early intervention can avoid use of herbicides and labour-intensive methods.

(c) Water Quality

(i) Council will monitor and improve the quality of water entering water bodies to inhibit nutrient rich environments which may result in undesirable infestations of aquatic plants.

(d) Maintenance Control

(i) Council will control maintenance of water bodies under its management to prevent infestations of aquatic plants.

(ii) Note: Council will use the following methods (mechanical and physical removal, environmental, chemical and biological) if assessed as the most cost-effective and environmentally sound control technique as per items 2 and 3 in this policy.

(e) Mechanical and physical removal

(i) Mechanical removal involves the removal of the plant biomass from the water body using specially designed harvesters or equipment. Mechanical harvesting can be difficult and expensive to implement.

(ii) Physical control includes the removal of plant material by hand and can also be expensive to implement unless intervention is early.

(f) Environmental control

(i) Control can be achieved by altering the water body in some way to limit the growth of aquatic plants including (but not limited to):

A. Lowering the water level to expose submerged plants to the sun; and

B. Limiting the inflow of nutrients by diverting nutrient or poor-quality water.

(g) Chemical control

(i) Control by chemical can only be undertaken by suitably qualified Council personnel or contractors with the appropriate licences and/or permits as required by relevant legislation and regulation.

(h) Biological control

(i) Biological control uses the natural enemies of the plant to attack, weaken and kill it. Biological control agents are available for a limited number of species and may not be successful in some areas due to climatic and other constraints.

8. Aquatic Plant Removal on Private Land

8.1. Aquatic plant management on private properties will be completed by the landowner in accordance with relevant legislation and regulations.

8.2. Further information for private landowners is available at from the NSW Government (http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au).

Related Documents

- Application Form - Request for Council Management of Aquatic Plants.
- Narrabri Lake - Public Access Locations Map.

References

Jurisdiction	Relevant policy, legislation, and planning frameworks
International	Convention on Wetlands (RAMSAR 1971 Convention)
National	*Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth) Australian Weeds Strategy Weeds of National Significance (WONS) Strategies National Environmental Alert List
State	*Local Government Act 1993* (NSW) *Biosecurity Act 2015* (NSW) *Protection of the Environment (Operations) Act 1997* (NSW) *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (NSW) *Fisheries Management Act 1994* (NSW) *Pesticides Act 1999* (NSW)
Regional	Catchment Action Plans (CAP) Namoi Northern Inland Weeds Advisory Committee (NIWAC) Weeds Action Plan (WAP)
Local	Narrabri Lake Plan of Management 2013 Narrabri Lake Planting Plan 2014

History

Minute Number	Meeting Date	Description of Change
781/2014	December 16, 2014	Adopted
164/2017	August 15, 2017	Reviewed
	August 31, 2021	Rebranded
336/2022	October 18, 2022	Adopted