

Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands

Positive Ageing Plan

DRAFT DOCUMENT

(2020-2024)

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Background

The Shire's Strategic Community Plan 2016 – 2026 outlines community expectations underpinning Shire priority-setting, planning and decision-making for the lifespan of the plan. The vision and key aspirations set out in the plan provide the basis for actions to achieve community goals, detailed in the Corporate Business Plan 2018/2019 – 2021/2022. These plans provide the framework for developing and integrating this Positive Ageing Plan as a priority action aligned with the objective of supporting the Cocos senior community.

Throughout Australia, the population is ageing¹, and Cocos is no exception. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the population on Cocos (Keeling) Islands has been progressively ageing over the last four census periods, with the proportion of those aged 65 years and over increasing from 4.8% in 2001 to 15.5% of its 544 residents in 2016. According to projections in a recent report by PwC², the total population on Cocos is expected to remain relatively stable over the next few years, however the proportion of those aged 65 years and over is projected to rise to 23% by 2023.

While the focus of this plan is the Cocos senior community, general background information on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands can be found in the abovementioned strategic and business plans.

What is a Positive Ageing Plan and why do we need one?

The Shire is committed to providing a supportive, accessible and inclusive community on Cocos. Community aspirations and corresponding objectives detailed in the Strategic Community Plan 2016 – 2026 and Corporate Business Plan 2018/2019 – 2021/2022 align with this commitment, providing a mandate for the development of this Positive Ageing Plan.

Seniors make significant contributions to social, economic and cultural life locally, with a vast lifetime of knowledge and experience that makes for a richer and stronger community. Population trends demonstrate an ageing population on Cocos. The implications of an ageing population present opportunities and challenges for the Shire and broader community. It is therefore imperative to plan for appropriate support and sustainable services as the population ages. In order to plan effectively, the Shire has developed this Positive Ageing Plan in partnership with the senior community to provide direction for how it will enhance opportunities and address challenges. The purpose of the Positive Ageing Plan is to support the senior community to lead engaged, valued, quality lives on Cocos. Although not the focus of this plan, any improvements to community facilities or services as a result of this plan may offer benefits to the broader community and local economy.

For the purpose of developing this plan, a 'senior' was defined as a resident aged 60 years and over. This allowed input from those transitioning into the 65 years and over demographic for the period covered by this Plan. Although residents aged 60 years and over were specifically invited to participate in the development of the Plan, participation was open to anyone wanting to contribute to community engagement.

Consultation process

In March 2020, the community was informed of the development of the Positive Ageing Plan through several channels. Advertising appeared in the Atoll; on the Shire website; Shire and Cocos community Facebook pages; on posters displayed on the front door of the Shire office; and through word-of-mouth promotion via key community members. Advertising invited residents to participate in community workshops held on Home Island and West Island. Alternative methods of participation were offered including over the phone and in person, with Cocos Malay translation and assistance if required.

The community workshop on Home Island was held on Friday 13th March with 11 participants. All information was delivered in Cocos Malay and participants were divided into groups of 3-4 people to facilitate focussed discussions using open ended questionnaires. A translator was assigned to each group to assist and document contributions. This method was adopted to reduce barriers to participation. Individual responses within each group were documented together and as such, true weighting of each response cannot be determined. Participant responses should be considered in this context.

The community workshop on West Island was held on Saturday 14th March with 5 participants. Participants discussed their responses to questionnaire prompts as a single group with facilitators with each participant documenting their responses individually.

Extra questionnaires were handed out to interested participants at the end of each workshop to distribute to anyone wanting to contribute who were unable to attend the workshops. No further contributions were received.

The Indian Ocean Territories Health Service (IOTHS) were consulted as an external stakeholder to clarify the role of IOTHS in response to community comments regarding aged care planning and access to health services.

The consultations have informed this Plan's strategies as well as the development of meaningful actions for implementation.

The experience of Cocos seniors

What does positive ageing mean to Cocos seniors and what are the positive impacts on their lives?

It was clear through community engagement that the positive impacts on the lives of Cocos seniors embody a positive environment for maintaining quality of life and healthy lifestyles. What contributes to quality of life varies individually, however seniors across both islands share many values. When defining positive ageing and the positive impacts on their lives, seniors recognised many contributing factors, including:

- Maintaining health and fitness;
- Embracing the natural environment;
- Enjoying the freedom to go about everyday activities in a safe community;
- Being respected and valued by the broader community;
- Continuing opportunities to make contributions to the community;
- Maintaining social networks beyond generational boundaries with friends and family;
- Having support from family to rely on with increasing age; and
- Having an accessible community with ease of access to community facilities.

Embracing the stunning natural environment, inclusive intergenerational networks and feeling safe in the community are values largely echoed by the broader community during the strategic community planning process.

What age-related challenges do Cocos seniors face?

There are distinct challenges inherent in all stages of the lifespan. Some challenges relate to individuals themselves while others relate to the environments in which people live. Challenges faced by Cocos seniors vary, but broadly consist of:

- A lack of organised social activities and participation constraints;
- Health and wellbeing;
- Physical and general community accessibility issues including cost of living and housing concerns; and
- Regulatory uncertainty in relation to road rules.

What makes Cocos a great place to grow older?

When discussing what makes Cocos a great place to grow older, seniors described the positive lifestyle, accessibility, and friendly social fabric supporting inclusion, safety and welfare.

What would improve the experience of growing older on Cocos?

Provision of services, improved accessibility as well as infrastructure were highlighted as areas that could support ageing on Cocos.

Health services were a focus of some community responses, particularly in relation to aged care planning. While health and aged care services are primarily the remit of the IOTHS, the Shire recognises the role it can play in providing support as an active partner of the IOTHS to promote collaborative advocacy for the senior community.

Additional comments from the workshops

Other comments regarding positive ageing related to:

- Mobility issues;
- Transport issues;
- Social and wellbeing activities and facilities;
- Aged care planning; and
- A desire to remain on Cocos.

Seniors were very positive in their feedback regarding the consultation process for this plan, particularly in relation to the initiative itself, the inclusion of seniors in the plan's development and the opportunity for participation.

Plan objectives

The objectives of this plan are based on the understanding that issues facing seniors are broad and interconnected with the community and services that are beyond the remit of the Shire. In order for the Shire to show leadership and help address those issues within the community, a collaborative effort in partnership with other organisations is required.

The plan objectives align with the aspirations and priorities set out in Strategic Community Plan 2016 - 2026 and Corporate Business Plan 2018/19 - 2022/22. These relate to the economic, social, environment and civic leadership key result areas and include:

- Encourage economic stability and diversity on the Islands;
- Providing community facilities and promote social interaction;
- Advancing Cocos whilst keeping its island character; and
- Leading in making things happen.

Positive Ageing Action Plan

Abbreviations: Strategic Community Plan (SCP); Corporate Business Plan (CBP)

| Objective 1: Support community participation | | | | |
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| Goal: The Shire will ensure its planning, promotion and partnerships provide opportunities for seniors to actively participate in the community | | | | |
| Strategy | Action | Measurement | Responsibility | Alignment with SCP and CBP |
| Address access barriers to enable participation and inclusion of seniors in community life | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess beach access points at key locations and consider sustainable solutions that are sympathetic to the environment Ensure information is delivered in accessible formats Continue to plan for and implement infrastructure upgrades including improvements to footpaths and paving | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment completed Information delivered in appropriate formats Improved accessibility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shire External partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide community facilities and promote social interaction Advance Cocos whilst keeping its island character Encourage economic stability and diversity on the islands |
| The provision of services and facilities that enhance opportunities for social connection | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate the feasibility of a “Community Shed” to provide space and equipment for seniors to maintain, teach or learn skills; promote social connection and enable continued contributions to the community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigation undertaken | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shire External partners where appropriate Senior’s group | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide community facilities and promote social interaction |

| and wellbeing for seniors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support opportunities for the provision of social, recreational and sporting activities for seniors including intergenerational and interisland opportunities • Continue supporting the senior's community group | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities supported • Support provided | | |
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| Objective 2: Improve planning and advocacy | | | | |
| Goal: The Shire will ensure it maximises opportunities for seniors through effective planning and advocacy | | | | |
| Strategy | Action | Measurement | Responsibility | Alignment with SCP and CBP |
| Plan for the current and emerging needs of seniors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review this Plan regularly and enable input from seniors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seniors consulted and Plan reviewed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shire • Senior community • External partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead in making things happen |
| Continue to advocate for the senior community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the capacity to expand a role to advocate for seniors • Partner with Commonwealth Community Service Officer to maximise opportunities for seniors • Communicate community concerns regarding aged care planning to the IOTHS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment completed • Partnership strengthened • Communication conveyed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shire • Commonwealth partners • IOTHS | |

| The provision of information sessions to seniors as needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate cross-organisational collaboration to inform seniors on a range of community services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information sessions provided | | |
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| Promote initiatives that support seniors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure initiatives are promoted on the Shire website, in the Atoll and in partnership with Commonwealth Community Service Officer to ensure maximum reach | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiatives promoted | | |
| Advocate for funding to address the needs of seniors and the delivery of services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply for funding grants where applicable | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grant applications submitted | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shire | |
| Objective 3: Foster partnerships and community strengthening | | | | |
| Goal: The Shire will establish and/or strengthen partnerships with external partners and the community to maximise resource efficiency and enhance opportunities for the senior community | | | | |
| Strategy | Action | Measurement | Responsibility | Alignment with SCP and CBP |
| Facilitate consultative and collaborative leadership which strengthens interorganisational partnerships to enhance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maximise opportunities for interorganisational partnerships where possible | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnerships strengthened | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shire External partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead in making things happen |

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| opportunities for seniors | | | | |
| Consult, engage and partner with seniors to strengthen relationships, value their input, maximise participation, assist with effective implementation, review and evaluation of the Plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to facilitate engagement opportunities with seniors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement opportunities provided | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shire | |

References

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018. Australia's health 2018. Australia's health series no. 16. AUS 221. Canberra: AIHW.
2. PwC. Indian Ocean Territories Health Service 5 Year Strategy: Final Report. Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities. 2019 Mar 26.