

GWYDIR SHIRE

**CULTIVATE COOLATAI
PROGRAM**



Coolatai park and tennis courts

**DRAFT COMMUNITY
STRATEGIC PLAN 2005**

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1. DEPARTMENT OF STATE AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

The Department of State and Regional Development has two community funding programs to revitalise communities throughout NSW by providing them with assistance and guidance. The Main Street/Small Towns Program (MS/STP) is aimed at larger communities with populations of 1,500 – 15,000. The Towns and Villages Futures Program (TVFP) is aimed at small communities with populations of 2,500 or less. Gwydir shire villages can apply for funding through the TVFP, but can also apply for funding on shire-wide projects with other towns through the MS/STP which provided funding for this shire-wide planning process.

The Department's community economic development programs provide a framework to pull a diverse range of community stakeholders together under one strategic umbrella. Benefits include cohesive strategic planning on issues affecting the community, wider networking opportunities, greater impact and value to businesses and community groups and added value to Council. The programs build social capital within a community and the shire by establishing communication channels, trust, relationships and networks.

Economic development is entwined with social development in rural communities, so it is necessary for the planning process to take a holistic approach to all the issues affecting communities.

A community economic development program is achieved by harnessing local skills and resources and planning together to implement practical, achievable community and business projects. The community planning workshops develop a community plan with an agreed vision for the future, a consensus of prioritised issues affecting the community and a series of projects to address the issues. The program includes an organisational structure of community volunteers to implement the projects and methods to run the program to ensure its ongoing success and sustainability. The key elements of the program include:

Organisation – creating an organisation with broad stakeholder representation of retailers, business people, property owners, council, community groups, farmers and residents to unite and work towards a common goal.

Economic Development – developing and strengthening local businesses and developing opportunities for new businesses/industries to provide a sustainable economic base.

Physical Design – addressing all physical aspects of the town, village or area such as improving traffic, parking, tree planting and landscaping, signage, public facilities and preserving the unique qualities and heritage of the town and surrounding environment.

Events and Marketing – promoting the area and increasing community pride and social activities with events and marketing campaigns to target local residents, tourists and commercial markets.

Social Development - addressing the community's social, cultural, health, youth and elderly issues as a holistic approach to long term economic development.

2. THE ROLE OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The role of this document is to:

- Act as a framework to direct the development of the community program
- Facilitate cooperative working relationships between the community, businesses, Council and other external partners
- Formalise the goals and objectives of the community in relation to its economic and social future

The plan is divided into the following three categories:

1. Where are we now?
 - Situation Analysis
 - SWOT
2. Where do we want to go?
 - Vision and Mission Statements
3. How are we going to get there?
 - Key Result Areas
 - Objectives
 - Issues
 - Action Based Program of Projects
 - Program organisational structure
 - Implementation of projects by volunteer teams
 - Regular monthly meetings
 - Reporting channels to Council
 - Communication channels with Council and other towns and villages throughout the shire

The Plan contains vision and missions statements and a set of strategic priorities and objectives that have been developed to guide the community program over the next 2-3 years. The status of each current project is reviewed regularly at monthly meetings and reported to the Gwydir Shire Council and to the community via local newsletters or newspaper columns.

A second document titled 'Summary of Outcomes' details all the information gathered at the workshop. This is an internal working document that can be used as a resource to refer to as projects are finalised and new actions are sought to address the key issues nominated by the community in this plan.

3. SITUATION ANALYSIS

The following information was gathered from a variety of sources, including anecdotal information from the workshops, members of the community, Gwydir Shire Council staff, 2001 ABS statistics, the Yallaroi Shire Strategic Plan 2001, the Warialda Community Plan 2003, Gwydir shire tourism documents and Gwydir Country website.

3.1 Gwydir Shire

The Gwydir Shire is located in the north west of NSW and covers an area of 9,122 square kilometres, extending from the Inverell Shire on the western tablelands to the Moree Shire on the western plains. It encompasses a diverse landscape that is both picturesque and productive, with undulating hills that flatten out to the west and the beautiful Gwydir River.

The Gwydir Shire was formed on 17th March 2004 by the amalgamation of the Yallaroi Shire, the Bingara Shire and 40% of the land mass of the Barraba Shire.

In the past, like many other small, rural shires, the Councils of Bingara, Yallaroi and Barraba were centred around one major town. On the small rate base collected, it was difficult to extend resources and services into the outlying villages and rural communities.

The shire now covers a large land mass with a population of less than 6,000 people, which still creates a small rate base to provide facilities and services to the shire. However it is anticipated that there will be some improvement for villages and rural communities by creating a 'larger voice' representing a wider area on issues affecting the shire. A major issue from the outlying villages in the shire is the state of the roads, which are difficult to maintain, let alone upgrade.

3.1.1 Population and Census Data

Due to the recent amalgamation of the shire, there is no accurate core data available for population statistics of the towns, villages and surrounding rural areas within the new shire boundaries. The Amalgamation Proclamation in March 2004 stated a shire population of 5,790. The following population statistics for the villages and surrounding communities are based on the number of people who voted in the last elections, the number of children attending local schools and an estimation of pre school aged children and high school children attending education outside the shire boundaries.

Bingara	1,390
Coolatai	130
Crooble	40
Croppa Creek	120
Gravesend	205
North Star	200

Rocky Creek	35
Yallaroi	100
Upper Horton / Cobbadah / and southern end of the shire	280
Warialda	1,750
Warialda Rail	100
Other rural areas	1,440
Total	5,790

The Gwydir shire is experiencing an ageing population. As the Gwydir Shire is yet to establish statistics within the new shire boundaries, the following tables from the 2001 ABS census outlines statistics for the Yallaroi and Bingara shires and shows a percentage breakdown of the community by age compared with the NSW average. The Bingara section of the Gwydir Shire has a particularly high ageing population.

Age structure	Yallaroi Shire	Bingara Shire	New South Wales
0-4 years (infants)	7.4	5.3	6.7
5-17 years (children)	20.1	14.5	18.3
18-64 years (adults)	59.5	58.2	61.9
65-84 years (mature adults)	12.1	20.4	11.7
Over 85 years (senior citizens)	1.0	1.8	1.4

The following table shows a percentage breakdown of the family/household type compared with the NSW average, taken from the 2001 ABS statistics.

Family/household type	Yallaroi Shire	Bingara Shire	New South Wales
Couple without child(ren)	40.9	49.6	34.9
Couple with child(ren)	47.1	35.2	47.8
One parent family	11.0	13.5	15.5
Lone person households	29.1	38.6	31.6

The following table shows a percentage breakdown of weekly household incomes compared with the NSW average. This table indicates significantly lower earnings in the Gwydir Shire than the rest of the state.

Weekly household income	Yallaroi Shire	Bingara Shire	New South Wales
Less than \$300	16.6	17.8	12.2
\$300 to \$999	50.0	54.8	39.4
\$1,000 and over	18.6	12.3	36.9

The following table shows a percentage breakdown of employment status compared with the NSW average.

Employment status	Yallaroi Shire	Bingara Shire	New South Wales
Total employed	93.1	92.2	92.8
Total unemployed	6.9	7.8	7.2

3.1.2 History

The Gwydir Shire area was originally populated by the Weraeria tribe and there are several known aboriginal sites in the region such as carved trees, bora grounds and open campsites that are protected under the National Parks and Wildlife Act.

In 1827, explorer/botanist Allan Cunningham travelled from Sydney and camped on the junction of Halls Creek and the Gwydir River which he named after his benefactor "Lord Gwydir of Wales".

Following this expedition, squatters travelled north and took up parcels of land. In 1838 the Slaughterhouse Creek and Myall Creek massacres occurred, where some 200 aboriginals were slain at Slaughterhouse Creek and the Myall Creek massacre was renowned as the first time that white men were tried and executed for the murder of aboriginal people.

In 1840 a police post was set up at "Warialda" which means "place of wild honey", the title given to the area by the local Aboriginal people. It was a well known crossing place so a logical choice for an out post. The New South Wales Government established administration centres in the interior of the country to administer the activities of pastoralists (squatters) and Warialda was one of the sites chosen.

In 1847 Warialda became the administrative headquarters for the Gwydir squatting district and the permanent headquarters for the Assistant Commissioner of Crown Lands. It became the administrative centre and focal point of the region because so much official and legal business had to be transacted there. On December 22 1846, it was listed as a place where Courts of petty sessions were held. Warialda was Gazetted as a village in 1849 with Bingara being officially recognised as a village in 1852.

A number of historic buildings remain a part of the Gwydir Shire landscape and they provide a glimpse into the history of the towns and district. The discovery of gold in 1853 brought prospectors to the area and when copper and diamonds were discovered in the 1880's, rapid development followed. Bingara was the largest supplier of diamonds in Australia during this time.

3.1.3 Agriculture

The Shire's economic base is dominated by agriculture and the service facilities attached to that sector. Agriculture is the most significant contributor to the gross regional product, with stock of beef, sheep, pigs and summer and winter crops such as wheat, sorghum, oats and barley. There is currently a small trend to diversify into other areas such as aquaculture, olives, dry cotton, lupins and oil seeds such as sunflower and linseed.

Gwydir Shire has good quality and availability of groundwater. The land in the shire is of high quality overall, with parts of the area well known for its rich, black soils. The reliance on agriculture means that the area is very dependent on good seasons and the recent devastating drought has had a flow on effect that has affected all the communities.

3.1.4 Business and Retail

The shire is situated in an excellent, central location to attract manufacturing and other industries as it is approximately 50km from the Newell Highway, 450kms south of Brisbane, 1,200kms north of Melbourne and 640kms north west of Sydney.

Both Bingara and Warialda are serviced by supermarkets, hardware shops and suppliers of agricultural products, as well as a range of services such as accountants, bookkeeping, solicitors and doctors.

However, there are a limited number of retail stores with gaps in the market such as clothing, shoe shops, pampering products and a limited range of gift lines. There are snack bars and take away food in both centres, but a lack of restaurants and food variety.

The banking facilities within the shire include the National Bank in Bingara, the New England Credit Union in Bingara and Warialda, an in-store Westpac agency in Warialda and Commonwealth Bank facilities at the Post Offices. For other banking facilities, the community leaves the shire.

The lack of choice and variety in retail, hospitality, services, medical and banking facilities creates escape spending patterns as people travel to larger centres for one of the services and subsequently conduct their shopping outside the shire. This in turn creates detrimental spending for new businesses to open locally, as they need the support of the shire communities to remain viable.

Telecommunications are an important issue within the shire. With the introduction of broadband internet and improved mobile services, the number of home-based businesses has increased in the two larger centres. Satellite connections are available in some rural areas. However, many of the rural based communities identified poor, slow internet services and lack of mobile coverage as a hindrance to their business and nominated upgrading

telecommunications throughout the shire as a major issue to remaining competitive in today's marketplace and essential for future expansion.

There are great variations in the economies of the shire. For instance several businesses are starting to export innovative products, aquaculture is expanding and some agricultural areas in the north of the shire are thriving whereas other sections are struggling to survive.

Another major issue affecting the Gwydir Shire is the lack of vacant land and appropriate housing for rental or purchase. The local indigenous community currently has an Aboriginal Land Rights claim over the whole shire which is inhibiting the introduction or expansion of industrial, commercial and residential land. It is imperative to resolve this issue to meet current business and community needs and future expansion.

Plumbers, electricians, builders, brick layers – in fact, most trades people are in great demand as they are either not available or very difficult to obtain. The impacts of this include having to wait a long time for quotes, let alone for the work itself and paying higher rates for the amount of travel for trades people to come to the shire. Another issue affecting the use of trades people is the shire's proximity to the Queensland border with Queensland trades people unable to practice in NSW due to licence differences, making an even smaller pool to choose from.

The lack of trades people, coupled with a strong Vocational Education program in the shire provides an opportunity to upskill local youth with a view to establishing businesses within the shire to service the trades area. Council is currently conducting a Skills Audit to identify gaps in the shire for skills, businesses and services. The information gained from this Audit will be used to attract businesses to the shire and identify training needs for long term sustainability.

3.1.5 Tourism

Tourism is steadily increasing in the shire as people leave the busier roads of the Newell and New England Highways for the more picturesque, quieter and safer roads of the Fossicker's Way, providing the most direct route from Sydney into Queensland.

The shire is currently working on an inter-regional tourism project to promote an alternative north/south touring route, particularly to the 'grey nomads'. The route will link the Gwydir, Inglewood, Milmerran and Wambo (around Dalby) Shires as an alternative route to central Queensland, through to Harvey Bay.

The Gwydir Shire has a number of attractions including the caves, horse riding, bushwalking, bird watching and a variety of waterfalls, streams, rivers and dams ideal for aquatic pursuits including fishing, canoeing or whitewater rafting. The more recognised attractions include Cranky Rock Reserve, Limestone Caves, Koorilgur Nature Walk, Myall Creek, the abundant bird and

wildlife and fossicking for gold or semi-precious stones in one of the many fossicking areas.

Accommodation in the shire consists of pubs, motels and caravan parks in the major towns, with a small number of farm stays. Many of the villages nominated the development of caravan parks or bush camping sites as projects for their community programs. Developing and linking these facilities with appropriate signage and marketing materials will provide a boost to the tourism industry and entice visitors to stay longer in the shire.

Each village area has a different character and appeal that could provide visitors with a satisfying tourist experience and opportunities for increased businesses within the shire. However, lack of accommodation and poor road conditions currently limit tourism to day trips throughout the shire, so improvement of the roads and an increase in accommodation will greatly increase tourism and business opportunities. The natural beauty and heritage of the area, the friendliness of the people and the exciting and diverse range of events and activities will encourage visitors to extend their stay, return again or market the area through word of mouth.

3.1.6 Education

The Gwydir Shire places a strong focus on learning and has been working for a number of years on innovative educational practices to increase the opportunities for learning in schools and the community. Facilities include pre-schools, public and catholic schools, TAFE outreach centres and Vocational Education programs.

Gwydir Shire has a pre school in Warialda three days each week, Bingara four days each week and a mobile pre school services the shire villages one day each week for North Star, Yallaroi, Crooble, Croppa Creek and Upper Horton once a fortnight. Due to economic and geographic issues, the goal for all children to attend pre school two days a week is not being achieved throughout the shire.

Primary school education throughout the shire area has also altered over the years due to fluctuating populations tied to the economic outcomes of agricultural areas. Croppa Creek has alarmingly decreased numbers attending the primary school and is struggling to keep the school open. Upper Horton and Coolatai have lost schools in previous years, even though their current school aged population would support a local school. Many villages in the shire without a primary school in the near vicinity cannot attract new and younger families and face a decreasing and ageing population. The removal of small schools from rural areas has a huge impact and a large multiplying effect on local communities.

Historically Bingara and Warialda schools have had lower than average educational achievements, so Bingara Central School and Warialda High have made a strong commitment to Vocational Education for school age and adult students to upskill the local community.

Both schools currently offer Vocational Education Training (VET) to students as young as year 9 and have the highest number of school based traineeships in NSW. VET is also offered through TAFE and ACE for TVET students and adults, so a wide range of courses are available.

Bingara Central School teaches students up to Year 10 and continuing senior school students attend either boarding school or Warialda High. The lack of years 11 and 12 at Bingara Central School has been an on-going issue for many years, however it is preferable to have the two schools work together to offer a wider range of courses.

Warialda High has won numerous awards in recognition of their students' achievements, winning national WorldSkills awards in hospitality, retail and business as well as many state finalists in a range of courses. Warialda High School also has a good academic record in the HSC with many students going on to tertiary education, so education levels in the shire have improved.

In a recent review of NSW education, Professor Tony Vincent highlighted the work of the two schools as a positive model for communities addressing local needs and developing strong partnerships between the local community and their schools. The Director General of Education Andrew Cappie Wood will be visiting the shire in August 2005 to look at the achievements in Vocational Education. The shire would like to develop the model further.

Courses in Adult Education may alter in 2006 due to funding decisions by state and federal governments. ACE Warialda is an outpost of Barraba Community Learning Association which is a registered training organisation, so their funding should not be affected. However, Bingara and Gravesend Adult Learning Associations are not registered training organisations and may not be funded after 2005, which is generating serious concern for the communities involved.

Until now, many of the educational courses were delivered to meet community needs and it has been possible to attend practical courses such as sewing, craft, art, woodwork etc. These courses bring the community together and build skills, confidence and self esteem, providing socialising opportunities that assist in developing community pride and sense of place. Under the new educational model, these courses won't be supported any more and outcomes will only be measured on Vocational Education courses.

Personal development and community development are valuable and integral parts of economic development. Many country people are isolated by long distances, hardships and economic issues and leisure learning courses provide a social and educational forum that delivers a range of benefits. They contribute to the general well being of rural communities, especially in a mental health context as people need somewhere to share their concerns and gain support. They are often the highlight of a community person's week and are a necessary part of the fabric of rural communities. The outcomes are more

difficult to measure, but certainly generate self esteem and confidence which in turn encourages the development of enterprises and initiatives within the community that increase quality of life. It is hoped that the governments will recognise the value of non-vocational courses and continue to support all learning outcome needs for communities.

3.1.7 Health and Community Services:

The Shire's main centres of Bingara and Warialda are serviced by modern medical centres and hospitals, both of which are in line to be upgraded to multipurpose health services. There are self care units for aged care in both communities managed by Council. There are also services to assist the aged and the disabled to remain independent in their homes, including Home and Community Care Services, Community Transport and Community Health Services.

However, lack of health care services was nominated by the rural communities as a major issue. These communities visit specialists in larger centres or rely on visiting services from Inverell or Moree as the population base isn't large enough to be considered in initial health and community services planning. There is a need to lobby at a regional level to ensure access to services and to attract travelling specialists to the shire to stop people having to travel large distances to access them in larger centres.

Both Bingara and Warialda provide Centrelink Agencies that enable the community to access this service without the need to travel to a major centre. Both towns also have a library and a Tourist Information Centre.

Bingara and Warialda have swimming pools and good sporting facilities. Swimming and football are strongly supported, but many other sports are struggling to have stand-alone competitions through lack of volunteers to manage the sports. Those who are currently managing local sports are burned out and struggling to keep them going. Many families join sporting associations in larger centres such as Inverell or Moree.

Sport has economic as well as social benefits for an area. When competitions or sporting days are presented in rural towns, a large influx of people attends the events and spends money in the area. Local sports create socialising activities for adults as well as helping youth to establish friendships that carry through into high school and create a sense of community. Current issues affecting sports in Gwydir Shire include insurance, sourcing and training volunteers and looking at creative ways of running sports through schools to keep the sports within the shire.

3.1.8 Gwydir Shire Community Planning

The shire has strong connections within each community, making them self sufficient and self reliant with immense community pride. Gwydir Shire Council has taken an innovative approach to community consultation by obtaining funding from the Department of State and Regional Development to conduct a

series of community strategic planning workshops in eight communities throughout the new shire.

The process has provided valuable information to Council by making them aware of local community issues and their needs and expectations. It has established 'self help' programs in each community taking a 'bottom up' approach to community economic development, with each community identifying relevant issues and projects, upskilling and becoming more organised and proactive in improving their quality of life.

The process has also established a Community Consultation Network that links all the communities to Council and to each other via email, with occasional face to face meetings by the chair of each program, as required. This network will open up communication channels and assist in building community capacity by developing relationships and networks within the shire, with all stakeholders working together as a team towards agreed goals. The Network will provide Council with a tool to consult community programs on issues that arise and the communities can interact with each other, such as supporting each other's events or combining on funding applications for issues that affect a range of communities in the same area.

After completion of the initial workshops, feedback from the communities has been excellent, with a positive feeling that 'something is starting to happen'. The next stage of the process will include the establishment of regular meetings in each community to plan and implement the projects nominated on their community plans and Council to establish a small community grant for each location. This grant money can be used by each community as matching funds for government funding programs, nominating Council as the sponsoring organisation and thereby creating a true partnership between communities, Council, state and federal government departments.

3.2 Coolatai

Coolatai village and the surrounding district has a population of approximately 130 people. The village is situated above a creek in pretty, picturesque rolling hills, 40 km north of Warialda and 90km west of Inverell.

Major industries include cattle, some sheep and cropping of wheat, barley and sorghum.

The original landholdings for Coolootai Station were 200,000 acres. The name Coolootai derives from 'cooloo' which is the name of the reeds on Ottley's Creek which runs through the property and 'tai' which is an aboriginal ending meaning 'creek'.

The southern boundary ran from Boundary Gully (between Coolatai and Gournama on the road to Warialda) to the northern boundary than ran at Rocky Dam with Blue Nobby property. The eastern boundary was at Top of the Gap (between Coolatai and Wollangra) and the western boundary was between Coolatai and the Pepperbox

Sugarloaf with Yallaroi property. This landholding was taken up by an Englishman, Major R B Ottley in 1830. He built a homestead on the property and the ironbark slabs from this home are still in existence today.

Major Ottley returned to England and negotiated the sale of Coolootai Station to two English brothers named Charles and Alex Codrington in 1858. The Codringtons came out to Australia, settled in the area and extended the homestead. They led a gentrified lifestyle and in their younger days used to ride all the way to Melbourne to play cricket. At that time the station ran 3,000 cattle and 40,000 sheep.

They employed the Windham family to manage the station from 1863-1875 and then the Archer family from 1875-1890. The Codringtons did not manage their finances well and gradually fell into financial difficulties.

A famous Scotsman called Thomas Walker came to Australia with 2,000 pounds and became a money lender. He lived at Yaralla in Concord, Sydney. Thomas Walker made a deal with the Codringtons when he lent them money on the property – if they couldn't pay him back he would take a block of land. He kept taking blocks of land until the Walker estate eventually owned the whole station by 1890.

Thomas Walker owned four properties in the area, Coolootai Station, Tenterfield Station, Winton Station near Goondiwindi and Baronga Station. He also owned the famous Yaralumla Station and half of Melbourne. Thomas died in the 1886 and the properties were owned by his only daughter Dame Edith Walker and managed by trustees of the Walker estate. When he died, he was a double millionaire in pounds, a very wealthy man of his time.

The grandfather of the current owner of Coolootai Station was William Henry Walker who was related to Thomas Walker. He lived at Tenterfield Station and worked for the trustees of the Walker estate as general manager of the four properties from 1890-1900.

The father of the current owner of Coolootai Station was also called Thomas Walker and was the eldest of 14 children. He worked briefly at the Bank NSW until his father asked him to manage Coolootai Station.

By the turn of the century many of the large stations had been subdivided into smaller acreages. The young Thomas Walker drew one of the blocks at Coolootai Station during one of the subdivisions. However his father William died of a horse accident in 1900, so young Thomas gave his block to one of his brothers and moved back to Tenterfield Station to manage the four properties and provide a home for his mother and siblings.

Dame Edith Walker never married, so when Tenterfield Station was sold, she financed the young Thomas Walker to purchase the remaining 7,500 acres of Coolootai Station and he moved back to the area with his wife and family. When he died, Coolootai Station passed to his family. At the age of 88 Tom Walker, who was the youngest of five siblings, still resides on the property and ownership of the station is still within the family.

The original settlement for Coolatai Village was laid out in 1900 and was situated right on the creek. When the post office was established, it was decided that the spelling of Coolootai was too confusing for a village name, so it was altered to Coolatai. The settlement included the hall which is still there today, a store, a post office, a school and a pub, which opened in 1903.

The original pub was burned down during the war years and Coolatai had a temporary bar that only sold alcohol – there were no food and accommodation services. When the owner wanted to sell the licence, the community held a meeting over the issue to ensure that the temporary bar was upgraded. The new owner used the licence to build the new pub in its current location.

The pub was not operational recently for around 18 months until it was bought and is currently being renovated and upgraded into a first class facility that is an asset to the community. The pub and the community are gaining an excellent reputation in the shire and are beginning to draw a large crowd on weekends, which will increase when the renovations are completed and the facility is used to its full capacity. A dining room, meals, games area, children's area and good accommodation will be provided upon completion.

The one teacher school was closed down in the 1960s when the government decided to close small schools as it was thought that children were better off going to a larger school. The school building was moved to Warialda and a bus service was established to take the children to the larger centre.

Coolatai hasn't changed much since the early days. Although it has lost the post office and school, it has improved immensely through community efforts to establish the upgraded hall, the tennis courts, sports ground, park and public amenities.

Coolatai is a small village that has rarely received any outside assistance, so the community is very self sufficient and self reliant and has a strong sense of its issues and direction. The community strength derives from working together on community projects and constant social activities. For instance, the hall was recently painted throughout in a number of community Working Bees and every weekend people gather at the tennis courts for a game of tennis. Other community members see the game in action and arrive with a bar-b-que. The children make their own fun by playing tennis, basketball or in the park and interact as a group with limited intervention. There is always some form of activity and socialising on weekends at the tennis court area. It is a relaxed and easy country lifestyle. The community is extremely friendly and inviting, making new residents and visitors feel very welcome.

Other events at Coolatai include Pony Club activities, a Dance at least once a year and two tennis tournaments with people from Warialda, Ashford, Yetman and other surrounding districts invited to the competition. These tournaments are held on Mother's Day and Father's Day, with social activities attached for everyone to enjoy.

Another major event is the Cattle and Sheep Dog Trials which is a fairly large event for a small village, lasting for two days in September. The Dog Trials are renowned

as one of the best in the state and draw visitors from Walget, Scone, Casino, Rockhampton and everywhere in between.

The catering for the Dog Trials is done every year by the local Rocky Dam-Coolatai branch of the Red Cross. The branch was one of the first started during the Second World War and continues to this day, which is a matter of pride for the community. It also boasts younger members than most country branches. The branch caters for a variety of community events to fundraise for the Red Cross and their good works.

Coolatai is situated 3km from the 7,000 acre Aracoola National Park. The area was originally a property called White Rocks Station after the beautiful white rocks on the property. The last owners changed the name to Aracoola in recent times. The park consists mainly of scrublands, with the beautiful Ottley Creek running through the centre. It is a nature lovers' paradise. The wildlife in the area is unique as Aracoola is the border between the eastern seaboard and western division and most species of lizards, geckos and other native wildlife can be found. It is especially renowned for its birdlife as birds from all directions – north, south, east and west – converge on the area. However, the park is closed to the general public. Gaining access to Aracoola National Park for bushwalking or bird watching eco tourism tours could provide economic opportunities as Coolatai is a gateway to the park.

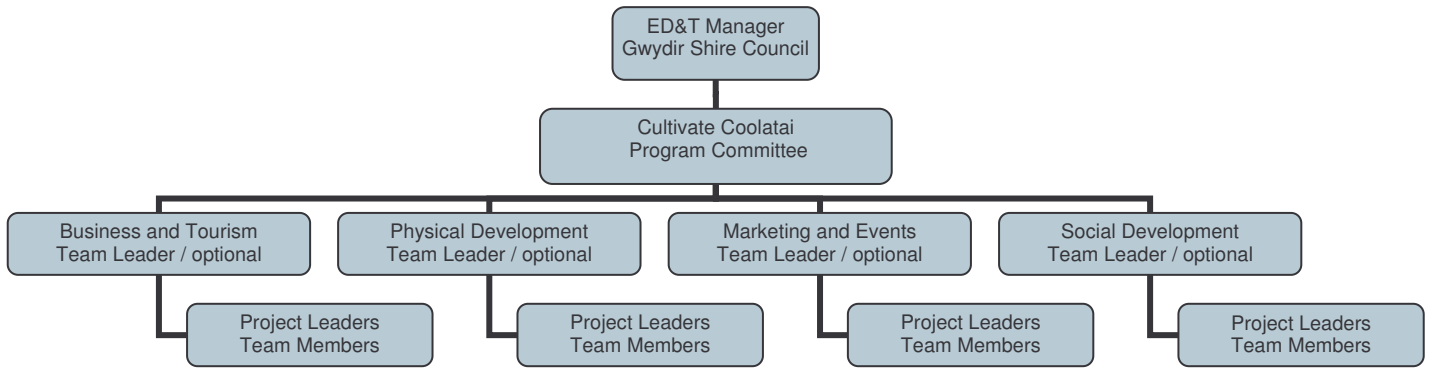
3.3 Cultivate Coolatai Program

The Cultivate Coolatai Program was formed on 11 May, 2005. A community Strategic Planning Workshop was funded by Gwydir Shire Council and the Department of State and Regional Development through the Main Street/Small Towns Program.

During the workshop current issues were identified, prioritised and placed under key result area groups. Attendees nominated short, medium and long term projects to address these issues. Project Leaders were identified for each project, where possible. The community developed a vision statement and the mission statement was devised from the objectives of each group. The name 'Cultivate Coolatai Program' was chosen through the planning process.

To ensure the sustainability of the program, discussion took place to hold regular, monthly Action Planning Meetings for the on-going planning and implementation of projects, discussion of issues that arise and the future program direction. As Coolatai is a small community, it was decided not to appoint Group Leaders for each key result area, but to work as a single group on a project-by-project basis. This method to run the program will be trialled and adjusted if necessary. The Chair of the program will act as spokesperson and gatekeeper of the program and will liaise with the Economic Development and Tourism Manager from Gwydir Shire Council.

The following organisational structure is a suggested model to outline the program's lines of communication:



- The Project Team members report to their Project Leader
- The Project Leaders report to the Committee - the Chair of the committee is spokesperson and gatekeeper to the program
- The Committee reports to the Gwydir Shire Council
- The Committee is linked to other communities in the shire via email on the Gwydir Shire Community Consultation Network



4. GWYDIR SHIRE COMMUNITY VALUES

A shire-wide community survey was conducted alongside the planning process. People were asked to nominate what they valued about living in the area. A summary of their major responses included:

- Friendly, caring people / sense of belonging to a community
- Peaceful and quiet / lifestyle / country values
- Safe / low crime rates
- Beautiful environment / space / clean
- Good facilities
- Agriculture / farming
- Good business / industry
- Cheaper/affordable living

The following Values Statement was formed:

Community Values Statement:

“Gwydir Shire communities value their friendly, caring people and strong sense of belonging to a community, peaceful and safe rural lifestyle, beautiful natural environment, rich agricultural land and good business opportunities”

5. SWOT

Strengths:

- Fishing Club
- Tennis Club
- Hall
- Close-knit community spirit
- People in general
- Sportsground facilities
- Hotel
- Birds in the morning
- Climate
- Lifestyle
- Good location - far, but not too far
- Anonymity
- On a tourist route
- Good soil to build on
- Cheap rates
- Magnificent cattle!
- Unbelievable horses!
- Diversification in agriculture
- Beautiful scenery
- Close to nature reserves
- Good creek
- Good underground water
- Good volunteers for community projects
- Community newsletter
- Low house prices
- Diverse wild life

Weaknesses:

- Worst rubbish tip in Gwydir shire
- Worst roads in Gwydir shire
- Poor telecommunications service and infrastructure – no mobile coverage or broadband, slow internet, poor television reception
- Dilapidated fire service and shed
- No access to nature reserves / National Parks (4 within 20 kms)
- Need a new, larger tank for community water supply
- Lack of population
- Poor maintenance of village
- Lack of funding for maintenance of community assets

(Weaknesses continued...)

- Remoteness
- Lack of specific community health needs eg brown snake anti venom
- Lack of Playgroups and other child socialising activities
- How house / land prices

Threats:

- Drought
- Further amalgamation of Council
- Government decisions – especially state government
- Greenies
- Fire in the National Parks – no maintenance of fire trails
- Population decline
- Influx of low socio economic people due to low house / land prices

Opportunities:

- National Parks / nature reserve access for tourism, good resource
- Caravan Park
- Backpackers
- Tourists travelling through – make them stop
- Shortest route from Tamworth to Dubbo and Queensland
- Develop a tourist drive through Coolatai
- Cheap land for housing, but few block available – land subdivision
- Bird watching
- Fix roads
- Fix tip
- Fix telecommunications
- Upgrade tennis courts
- Larger water tank
- Maintenance of village
- Improve fire service
- More playgroups etc
- Fix Weir (washed out)
- Eco tourism
- Photograph nature - best cloud formations

6. VISION AND MISSION STATEMENTS

Vision Statement:

“Coolatai is a thriving and diverse agricultural community set in a beautiful natural environment, supported by a caring, strong community spirit”

Mission Statement:

**“To develop opportunities for business, tourism, marketing, events, sport and children
To improve the roads and village facilities and beautify the town”**



7. KEY RESULT AREAS AND PRIORITISED ISSUES

The following key result areas were established:

- Business and Tourism Development
- Physical Development
- Marketing and Events
- Social Development

The following issues were nominated by the community and prioritised in order:

- Improve Roads
- Beautify Town
- Tourism Development
- Improve Existing Facilities
- Better Fire Fighting Infrastructure
- Signage
- Establish Small Caravan Park
- Sport
- Business Development
- Improve Telecommunications
- Events
- Health Services
- Children's Development
- Town Water
- Marketing

8. OBJECTIVES AND PROJECT PLANNING

8.1 BUSINESS AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Objective:

To develop business and tourism opportunities and improve telecommunications

- Develop a tourism brochure, powered caravan sites and signage by December 2006, lobby to improve telecommunications and establish two walking tracks by December 2007

Issues:

- Tourism Development
- Signage
- Business Development
- Improve Telecommunications

Business and Tourism Development Program of Projects:

ISSUE	PROJECTS	TIME
Signage	Establish new signage and improve existing signage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourist information board and map • Signs to facilities and amenities 	Short
	Establish welcoming Gateway signs at village entrances	Short
Tourism Development	Identify places of interest – compile a list of tourist attractions and activities for visitors.	Short
	Create bush walking and bird watching tracks	Medium
Business Development	Establish and supply general store goods	Short
Improve Telecommunications	Lobby to improve mobile phone coverage	Medium
	Lobby to improve internet service and for the supply of broadband	Medium
	Lobby to improve television reception	Long

7.2 PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Objective:

To improve roads, facilities, fire service and town water, develop a caravan park and beautify the town

- Lobby Council to improve roads and parking, develop a Village Plan, improve the Tip, establish a small caravan park and a fire fighting truck and facility by December 2007

Issues:

- Improve Roads
- Beautify Town
- Improve Existing Facilities
- Better Fire Fighting Infrastructure
- Establish Small Caravan Park
- Town Water

Physical Development Program of Projects:

ISSUE	PROJECTS	TIME
Improve Roads	Lobby Council to seal the streets within the village	Short
	Lobby for safer parking at the pub – curb, gutter and drainage	Medium
	Improve parking facilities around the village	Medium
	Lobby members of Parliament and RTA to improve and upgrade access roads to Coolatai, especially Bruxner Highway	Medium-long
Beautify Town	Develop a Streetscape Plan and overall plan for the village with results broken into periodical timeframes for implementation	short
	Establish regular maintenance of existing village buildings	Short
	Clean up and improve the Tip	Short
Improve Existing Facilities	Paint and Improve the building at the Sports Ground	Short
	Establish a roofed section over the BBQ Area	Medium
	Establish permanent yards and horse stables for use by Pony Club and Dog Trials	Medium
	Establish a permanent all-weather surface for the tennis courts	Long
Better Fire Fighting Infrastructure	Establish a suitable fire fighting truck with 4x4 equipment	Short
	Establish a Quickfill Facility for loading the fire truck	Short
	Establish a new Fire Shed	Medium
Establish a Small Caravan Park	Establish a small caravan park for tourists with powered and unpowered sites, managed by the community – utilise existing shower/toilet facilities	Short
Town Water	Establish a second tank at the Water Supply Bore - existing tank is too far away, project aids beautification / sporting facilities / caravan park projects	Short

7.3 MARKETING AND EVENTS

Objective:

To develop events and marketing opportunities

- Establish a marketing campaign for the Dog Trials, develop a village logo and tourism brochure and two events by December 2007

Issues:

- Events
- Marketing

Marketing and Events Program of Projects:

ISSUE	PROJECTS	TIME
Events	Establish a marketing campaign for the Dog Trials NSW and Australian Championships.	Short
	Establish Trivia Nights at the Hall/Pub to fundraise for community projects and encourage community social activities	Short
	Coordinate events for the Pony Club	Medium
	Establish a Ball / Dance at the Coolatai Hall	Medium
	Establish a Fun Sport Day annual event – value add with stalls and fun activities.	Medium -long
Marketing	Work with Tourism Consultant on developing tourism and marketing strategies for Coolatai	Short
	Develop a logo for Coolatai	Short
	Develop a tourism brochure for Coolatai	Short

7.4 SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Objective:

Develop opportunities for sport, children's development and health issues

- Establish a Fishing Competition, children's playground, a Play Group and attract new members to the Tennis Club by December 2007

Issues:

- Sport
- Health Services
- Children's Development

Social Development Program of Projects:

ISSUE	PROJECTS	TIME
Sport	Release fish fingerlings in the creek	Short-medium
	Establish a Fishing Competition / Carp Muster	Medium
	Attract new members to the Tennis Club	
Health	Lobby Warialda Hospital to have anti venean for common spiders and reptiles, especially brown snakes	Short
	Maintain general health services	Long
Children's Development	Develop a children's playground with appropriate equipment	short
	Develop a Playgroup	Short-medium
	Develop a Pre School	Long

8. SUMMARY OF PROJECTS

ISSUE	PROJECT	TIME
BUSINES AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT		
Signage	Establish new and improve existing signage, especially a Tourist information board and map; signs to facilities and amenities	Short
	Establish welcoming Gateway signs	Short
Tourism Development	Compile a list of tourist attractions and activities – places of interest	Short
	Create bush walking and bird watching tracks	Medium
Business Development	Establish and supply general store goods	Short
Improve Telecommunications	Lobby to improve mobile phone coverage	Medium
	Lobby to improve internet service / broadband	Medium
	Lobby to improve television reception	Long
PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT		
Improve Roads	Lobby Council to seal the village streets	Short
	Lobby for safer parking at the pub	Medium
	Improve parking facilities around the village	Medium
	Lobby members of Parliament and RTA to improve and upgrade access roads	Medium-long
Beautify Town	Develop a Streetscape Plan and overall plan	short
	Establish maintenance of existing buildings	Short
	Clean up and improve the Tip	Short
Improve Existing Facilities	Paint and Improve the Sports Ground building	Short
	Establish a roofed section over the BBQ Area	Medium
	Establish permanent yards and horse stables	Medium
	Establish all-weather tennis court surface	Long
MARKETING AND EVENTS		
Events	Establish a Dog Trials marketing campaign	Short
	Establish Trivia Nights at the Hall / Pub	Short
	Coordinate events for the Pony Club	Medium
	Establish a Ball / Dance at the Coolatai Hall	Medium
	Establish a Fun Sport Day annual event with stalls and activities	Medium
Marketing	Develop tourism and marketing strategies with Tourism Consultant	Short
	Develop a logo for Coolatai	Short
	Develop a tourism brochure for Coolatai	Short
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT		
Sport	Release fish fingerlings in the creek	Short-medium
	Establish a Fishing Competition / Carp Muster	Medium
	Attract new members to the Tennis Club	On-going
Health	Lobby Warialda Hospital to have anti venean	Short
	Maintain general health services	Long
Children's Development	Develop a children's playground	short
	Develop a Playgroup	Medium
	Develop a Pre School	Long