

Illawarra Shoalhaven

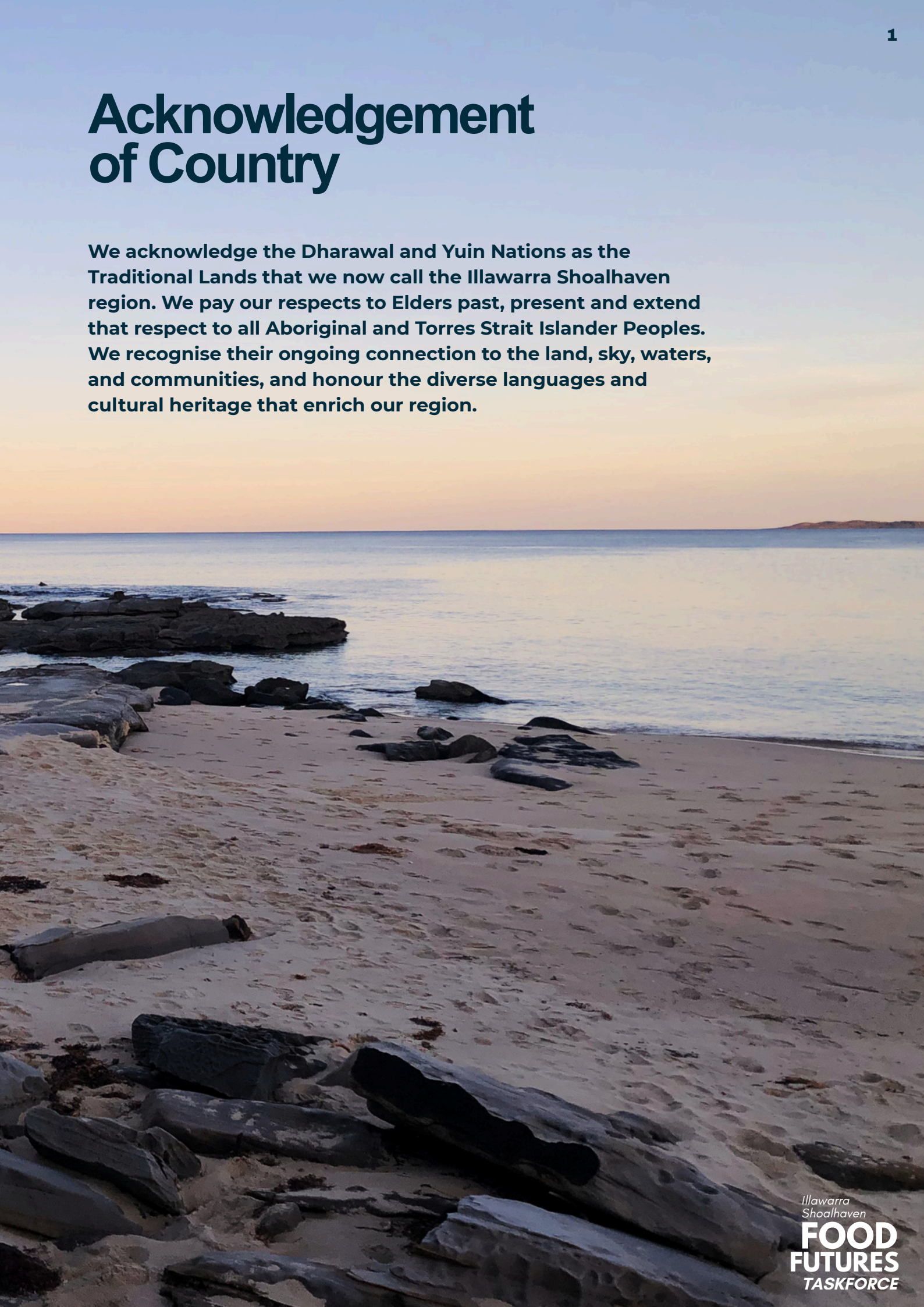
FOOD FUTURES TASKFORCE

Action Plan 2027 - 2030



Acknowledgement of Country

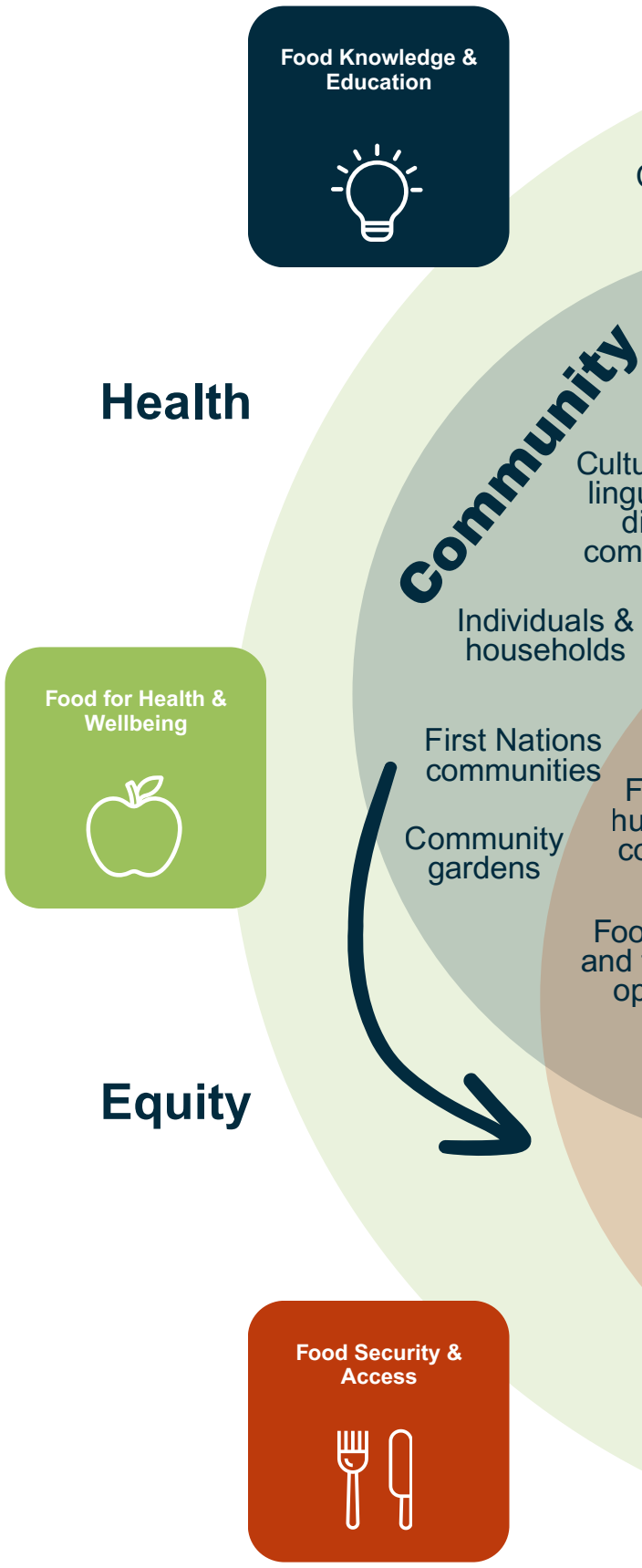
We acknowledge the Dharawal and Yuin Nations as the Traditional Lands that we now call the Illawarra Shoalhaven region. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. We recognise their ongoing connection to the land, sky, waters, and communities, and honour the diverse languages and cultural heritage that enrich our region.



Illawarra Shoalhaven
FOOD FUTURES TASKFORCE

The food system in the Illawarra Shoalhaven is complex

It involves a wide range of stakeholders across multiple sectors and services including businesses, government bodies, health professionals, researchers, educational institutions, individuals and community organisations. The Illawarra Shoalhaven Food Futures Taskforce (Taskforce) brings together key stakeholders across these sectors to work together and identify initiatives to strengthen the food system in our region to be healthier, and more prosperous, equitable, sustainable and resilient.





Illawarra Shoalhaven FOOD FUTURES TASKFORCE

Background

This Taskforce builds on many decades of work that has been done, and continues to be done, by individuals and organisations within the Illawarra Shoalhaven region, some of which are summarised on this page.

This background aims to provide a snapshot of key organisations, however it is not exhaustive, and there are many additional inspiring people, businesses and community organisations who have contributed to building a vibrant local food system in the Illawarra Shoalhaven. The Taskforce aims to provide a coordinated approach to 'join up' existing initiatives and provide a strategic framework to amplify the work already happening in our region.

Food Fairness Illawarra

Formed during Anti-Poverty Week in 2005, Food Fairness Illawarra (FFI) emerged from a shared recognition that collaboration and working together can achieve greater outcomes into the future. The community-led coalition consisted of three local councils, the local Health District, University of Wollongong, community groups, charities, businesses, and dedicated individuals. Over two decades, FFI, under the auspices of Healthy Cities Illawarra (now Healthy Cities Australia) has played a key role in shaping a more equitable, sustainable and resilient local food system.

Shoalhaven Food Network

Formed in 2021, the Shoalhaven Food Network (SFN) is a not-for-profit, member-based organisation that connects local growers, producers, chefs, and hospitality venues in the Shoalhaven region. The network actively promotes the region as a top NSW foodie destination, focusing on paddock-to-plate dining and sustainable agricultural practices. They promote local food and support regional tourism through events like the Autumn Celebration of Food and More Than Lunch series. In addition, their membership structure provides additional resources for local farmers, wineries, hospitality businesses, retailers and passionate foodies.

Illawarra Food Strategy 2013-2018

This strategy was developed by the Illawarra Shoalhaven Joint Organisation (ISJO) in collaboration with Wollongong, Shellharbour and Kiama councils. It presented a comprehensive place-based strategic framework to support the local food system in the Illawarra. However, this expired in 2018 and it has not been updated or renewed in the years since. Many of the recommendations within this strategy remain relevant.

Slow Food Convivia

There are three Slow Food convivia in the Illawarra Shoalhaven region: Slow Food South Coast, Slow Food Saddleback and Slow Food Berry to Jervis Bay. These convivia promote "good, clean, and fair" food by supporting local producers, fostering biodiversity, and hosting educational community events. They connect consumers directly with farmers, award local businesses with "Snail of Approval" accreditation, and run workshops to promote sustainable eating.

Local Councils in the Illawarra Shoalhaven

Local councils across the region help shape the food system through planning, advocacy, policy, community infrastructure and place-based initiatives. Their work includes supporting community gardens and kitchens, farmers' markets, food related community programs, waste and food recovery, and access to public land for food growing. Councils also influence food environments through zoning, land use and centre planning. Continued local government leadership is vital to protecting land for food production and supporting a healthier, more resilient and equitable regional food system.

University of Wollongong Researchers

Researchers at the University of Wollongong have been investigating issues related to the health, sustainability and equity of the local food system in the Illawarra Shoalhaven for many decades. Recent research by the 'Resilient and Sustainable Food Systems Research Group' has contributed to the Taskforce.

Grass-roots Community Organisations

There is a dynamic history of grass-roots community organisations supporting healthy and sustainable food practices within the region. These include crop swaps, community gardens, permablitz groups, These groups are often self-organising,

School Gardens

School gardens in the Illawarra Shoalhaven region are vibrant educational hubs, often featuring edible wonderlands as well as bush tucker plants. These gardens focus on sustainability, mental health, and hands-on learning, often utilizing, no-dig permaculture methods to engage students.

Food Rescue and Food Relief Organisations

Food rescue and relief in the Illawarra Shoalhaven region is a vital network, with key providers like OzHarvest and SecondBite rescuing nearly 13,000kg of food weekly to support thousands in need. Supported by initiatives like Food Fairness Illawarra and Warrawong Residents Forum, this sector combines waste reduction with community support, linking local supermarkets to community centres and food pantries.

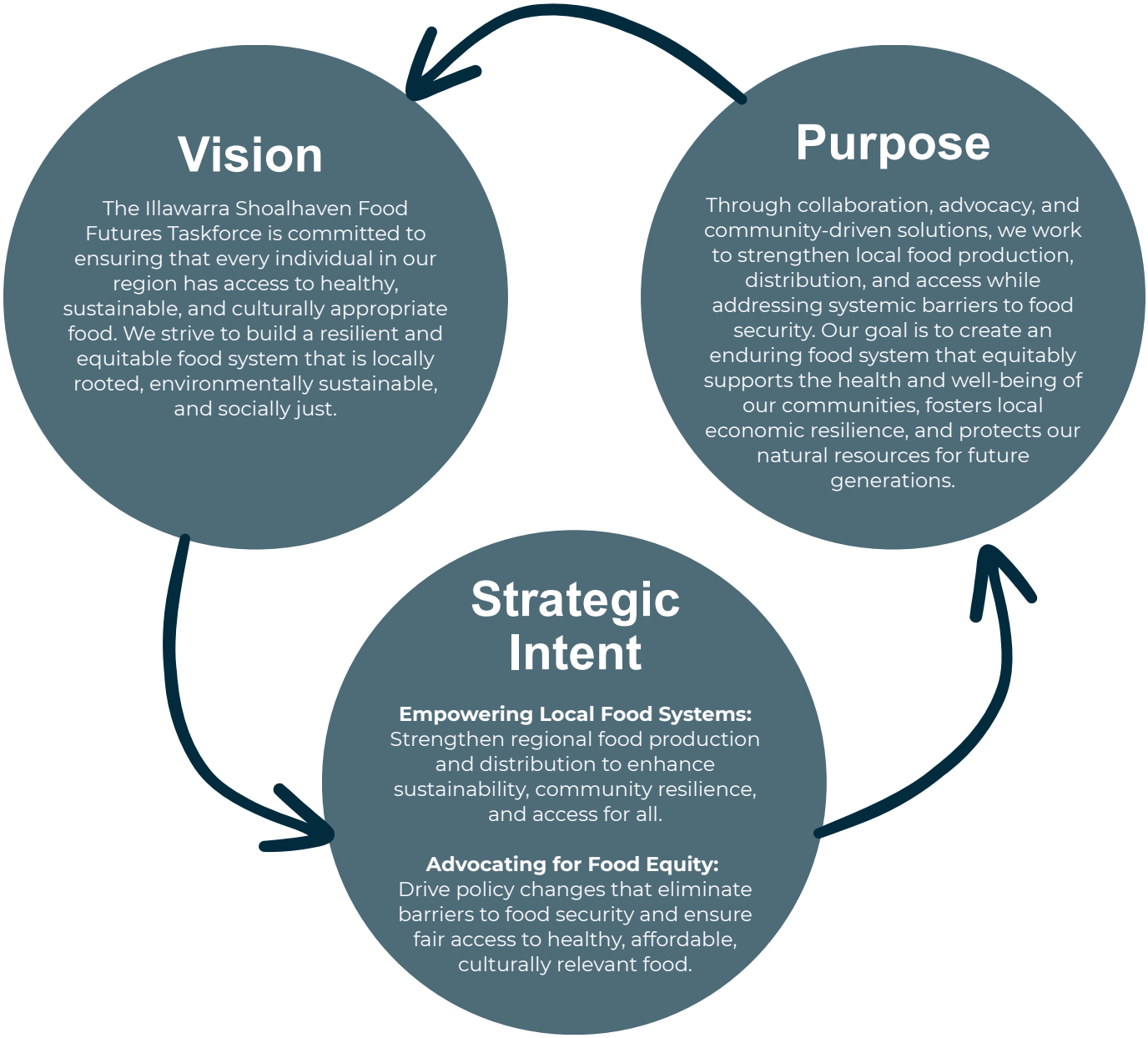
Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District

Through its Health Promotion Service, the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District (ISLHD) has worked with councils, schools, preschools, childcare centres, community organisations and families to improve access to healthy food, embed healthy eating in community and health settings, and create supportive food environments across the region.

About the Illawarra Shoalhaven Food Futures Taskforce

The Taskforce is coordinated by Regional Development Australia (RDA) Illawarra Shoalhaven, and includes representatives from:

- Regional Development Australia Illawarra Shoalhaven (RDAIS)
- University of Wollongong (UOW)
- Warrawong Residents Forum (WFR)
- Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District (ISLHD)
- Healthy Cities Australia (HCA)
- Lifeline South Coast
- Central Queensland University (CQU)
- University of New South Wales (UNSW)
- The University of Newcastle (UoN)
- Community Industry (CI) Group
- Good360



The Taskforce aims to strengthen the region's coordination, collaboration, and impact across six key focus areas:

Food Security & Access

Improve access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food for all people in the region.

Includes: food hubs, food relief programs, food coordinators, transport and logistics, emergency food and essential goods support, and redistribution of surplus resources.

Food for Health & Wellbeing

Use food as a tool to improve health, prevent illness, and support wellbeing through schools, health services, and community programs.

Includes: school meal programs, produce prescriptions, nutrition support in aged and disability care, and food programs integrated into health and social services.

Local Food Economy

Support local producers, retailers, and food-based tourism to build a fair, resilient regional food system.

Includes: farmers markets, local procurement, regional food tourism, small food businesses, social enterprises value-added enterprises, circular economy and resource use.

Food Production, Agriculture & Fisheries

Protect and expand food growing in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas to increase local supply and sustainability.

Includes: regenerative farming, urban agriculture, land use policies, farmer support, fisheries and aquaculture.

Food Environments & Planning

Shape healthier local food environments through planning and policy which prioritises equitable access to nutritious food.

Includes: consideration of the location of healthy and unhealthy food outlets including supermarkets, farmers markets, and fast food outlets, walkability, food deserts and infrastructure to support food access.

Food Knowledge & Education

Build a skilled workforce as well as promote lifelong food literacy to support confident, healthy eating across households, schools, and communities.

Includes: food education in schools, community cooking and nutrition programs, budgeting and shopping skills, and public awareness initiatives.



Focus Area 1: **Food Security & Access**

Food security in the Illawarra Shoalhaven is supported by a diverse, community-led network of food hubs, food relief agencies, community farms, schools, and informal redistribution initiatives. These services are trusted, adaptive, and deeply embedded within local communities. The region already has significant activity and assets, including existing infrastructure such as schools, community centres, kitchens, and farms, alongside active coordination groups and networks.

Consultation confirmed that the core challenge is not a lack of food, services, or goodwill. Instead, the system is constrained by fragmentation, inconsistent logistics, stretched workforce and volunteer capacity, and unclear pathways for donation and access. To sum it up, the strong message across all engagement was: “Don’t build more — make what we have work better.”

Strengthening the regional food system requires not only improved coordination and infrastructure, but sustained investment in the community organisations delivering food access and responding to food insecurity every day. Without investment in delivery, improved coordination alone will not translate into improved food security outcomes.

These issues underpin the three priority action areas outlined on the following page.

Priority 1.1
Food rescue and food relief logistics and coordination

Logistics is the key bottleneck in the regional food security system, with transport, timing, and coordination limiting the efficient movement of surplus food. Improved coordination and logistics of food access across the region, supported by sustained investment in infrastructure will support frontline service organisations to deliver and distribute food effectively.

Priority 1.1 will deliver more efficient movement of surplus food, reduced waste, improved access for communities, stronger positioning of food hubs as central coordination points and better support for community-based food relief organisations.

HOW: *Delivered through coordinated mapping and workshops with food hubs, donors, and partners to identify gaps, align logistics approaches, and trial shared use of existing transport and coordination systems. Coordination should be backed by sustained cross-organisational investment in both infrastructure and community organisations.*

Priority 1.2
Workforce and volunteer pathways

Workforce and volunteer capacity was identified as a key constraint across the food system, limiting the ability of food hubs, community farms, and rescue organisations to operate effectively. Challenges exist in sourcing and retaining people, and pathways into volunteering and employment are often unclear and fragmented. Strengthen workforce and volunteer pathways, with sustained funding to support recruitment, training, and retention across frontline food services.

Priority 1.2 focuses on strengthening the workforce pipeline by improving visibility of existing pathways, convening partners to identify practical workforce models (e.g. placements, supported employment, corrections programs), and building an evidence base to support advocacy to obtain sustained funding that supports recruitment, training and retention across frontline services. The outcome is a more coordinated and sustainable workforce system, reduced pressure on individual organisations, and stronger positioning of workforce needs in funding and policy discussions.

HOW: *Delivered through partnerships with employment services, education providers, and community organisations to map pathways, align programs, and pilot coordinated placement and volunteer models.*

Priority 1.3
Enabling local food access and visibility using existing community assets

Access to food is not limited by activity, but by visibility and connection. Existing school, community, and informal food access points are often hard to find, poorly connected, and under-recognised.

Priority 1.3 will deliver easier access to local food support, stronger uptake of existing models, and a more connected system without expanding services alongside investment in service capacity to ensure increased demand can be met sustainably.

HOW: *Delivered through reviewing and simplifying food access information, co-designing user-friendly directories, and sharing practical models across schools and community settings.*



Focus Area 2: **Food for Health & Wellbeing**

Food plays a critical role in shaping health and wellbeing outcomes across the Illawarra Shoalhaven. The region faces a high burden of preventable chronic disease, poor diet quality, and inequitable access to healthy food, particularly among children and people experiencing disadvantage. At the same time, there is strong evidence that improving access to nutritious food through schools, health services, and community settings can support health promotion, recovery, and wellbeing.

Consultation highlighted that food-for-health efforts already exist across the region, including community gardens, school-based initiatives, health promotion programs, and community food programs. However, these efforts are often fragmented, unevenly supported, and not consistently embedded within health, education, and social service systems. Participants emphasised the need to move beyond short-term programs and individual behaviour change, and instead use institutions, partnerships, and policy levers to normalise healthy food access as part of everyday care, learning, and wellbeing. These issues underpin the three priority action areas outlined on the following page.

Priority 2.1
Universal healthy school meals

Schools are a powerful but underused platform for improving nutrition, wellbeing, and equity. Local efforts remain fragmented and lack clear pathways to scale.

Priority 2.1 will deliver a coordinated regional position on school meals, stronger policy traction, and progress toward scalable, government-supported models.

HOW: *Delivered through targeted forums and working groups that bring together schools, government, and providers to review models, identify barriers, and align advocacy priorities.*

Priority 2.2
Food in health and community services

Many people experiencing food insecurity are already engaged with health and community services such as hospitals, disability services, aged care, public health services and community organisations, yet food is not consistently embedded in these settings as part of care.

Priority 2.2 will deliver more integrated, food-informed care systems, with services better equipped to support nutrition and wellbeing.

HOW: *Delivered through collaboration with selected services to scope feasible models, share practice examples, and trial integration of food-based supports within existing service delivery.*

Priority 2.3
Healthy food environments in institutions

Public institutions help shape everyday food choices but are not consistently using procurement and policy levers to support healthy, local food. These institutions include hospitals, sports centres, libraries, community centres, childcare centres, aged care facilities and disability services.

Priority 2.3 will deliver practical, tested approaches to healthier and more local food procurement, and stronger alignment between health and local food systems.

HOW: *Delivered through convening institutions to identify procurement opportunities and supporting small-scale trials within existing contracts and catering systems.*



Focus Area 3: **Local Food Economy**

A strong local food economy supports regional jobs, skills, resilience, and connection between producers and communities. Consultation showed strong support for investing in local food businesses and producers, but highlighted that growth is constrained by workforce shortages, limited time and capacity for promotion, land access challenges, and difficulty accessing procurement and market opportunities.

At the same time, the region already has important foundations in place, including active producer groups, local food markets with minimum local content requirements, existing producer guides, and emerging council leadership on local procurement. Participants consistently emphasised that the priority is not creating new structures, but better connecting producers to markets, institutions, and workforce pathways, and using government leadership to normalise local food purchasing and participation. These issues underpin the three priority action areas outlined below.

Priority 3.1
Access to markets and procurement

Demand for local food exists, but producers face barriers accessing markets and institutional buyers due to complex systems and low visibility.

Priority 3.1 will deliver stronger connections between producers and buyers, increased local procurement, and a more viable local food economy.

HOW: *Delivered through targeted engagement sessions, development of supplier summaries, and facilitated connections between producers and institutional buyers.*

Priority 3.2
Workforce pathways into the local food economy

There is low uptake for local jobs in agriculture and associated industries and local businesses face difficulties attracting staff.

Priority 3.2 will identify feasible work experience, placement, or entry-level pathways by convening producers, schools, training providers, and employment agencies to discuss opportunities and constraints.

HOW: *Delivered through promotion of local food careers through existing youth and employment channels and exploring new models of training.*

Priority 3.3
Profile of local food businesses

Local producers, hospitality, and agritourism are growing, but are not consistently visible or promoted across the region.

Priority 3.3 will deliver increased visibility, stronger local engagement, and growth in local food participation and tourism.

HOW: *Delivered through coordinated regional promotion, alignment of existing events and guides, and collaboration with tourism and industry partners.*

Focus Area 4: **Food Production, Agriculture & Fisheries**

Local food production, agriculture and fisheries in the Illawarra Shoalhaven are sustained by small producers, growers, fisheries and food businesses operating within a relatively small and connected community. Consultation highlighted that many producers feel isolated, and that where support does exist, it is often provided informally through friends and peers in business rather than through coordinated systems.

Producers consistently raised challenges related to seasonal staff shortages, difficulty accessing labour (including Woofers), and limited pathways to attract and retain a local workforce. Land access and land management were also identified as barriers, with local councils holding land but often lacking budget or mechanisms to support conservation, small-scale farming, or shared use. These pressures limit producers' ability to scale, innovate, or invest in long-term sustainability. There are also competing pressures on vacant, under-utilised or agricultural land for new housing and renewable energy.

At the same time, the region already has strong foundations. Informal grower forums, producer groups, panel discussions, local producer guides, tourism initiatives, and matching grants are active and valued. There is strong community interest in local produce, emerging philanthropic funding opportunities such as Grow the Future (Bega), and growing engagement with regenerative agriculture voices including Farmers Footprint Australia. Participants emphasised that the opportunity is not to build new programs or platforms, but to better connect what already exists and strengthen peer-to-peer learning, leadership, and collective voice.

The strong message across consultation was that producers need connection, visibility, and shared learning not more disconnected initiatives. These issues underpin the priority actions outlined on the following page.

Priority 4.1
Capacity and resilience of local producers

Local producers face ongoing challenges with time, climate adaptation, capacity, and long-term economic viability, and are not always well connected to each other or support systems.

Priority 4.1 will deliver more connected and supported producers, improved water security and drought resilience, and stronger representation of producer needs in decision-making.

***HOW**: Delivered through establishing regular networking opportunities, sharing practical resources, linking producers to training, funding, supporting sustainable food livelihoods and identifying climate adaptation needs.*

Priority 4.2
Visibility of local producers

Local producers and their products are not consistently visible or well connected to residents, visitors, or each other.

Priority 4.2 will deliver increased awareness, stronger engagement with local producers, and increased demand for local food through promotion of local producers.

***HOW:** Delivered through strengthening existing communication channels, improving producer directories, and coordinating cross-promotion across networks and events.*



Focus Area 5: **Food Environments & Planning**

Food environments play a critical role in shaping access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food across the Illawarra Shoalhaven. Planning decisions influence where food can be grown, sold, and accessed, and how people move through their neighbourhoods to reach food outlets. Consultation demonstrated strong community support for embedding food into planning systems and protecting land for food production, particularly as the region continues to grow.

Participants highlighted that many of the most effective levers already sit within local government, including zoning, development control plans, infrastructure planning, transport design, and redevelopment processes. Across the survey, focus groups, and workshop, the key issue identified was not the absence of policy tools, but uneven application, limited coordination between the four local councils in the region, and missed opportunities to consistently consider food in planning decisions.

These issues underpin the three priority action areas outlined on the following page.

Priority 5.1
Food in local planning

Food is not consistently embedded in planning systems or applied across councils in a coordinated way.

Priority 5.1 will deliver stronger and more consistent integration of food into planning decisions, improving access to fresh food and supporting local production.

HOW: *Delivered through cross-council forums, shared case studies, and identification of practical planning levers within existing policies and development processes.*

Priority 5.2
Coordinated food and planning advocacy

Advocacy on food and planning is often fragmented across levels of government and not well aligned.

Priority 5.2 will deliver a stronger, unified regional voice, with food more consistently reflected in policy, planning, and reform processes.

HOW: *Delivered through development of shared advocacy priorities, coordinated submissions, and engagement with decision-makers across local, state, and federal levels.*

Priority 5.3
Place-based food environments

Community-led food initiatives are active but not consistently connected to planning and development processes.

Priority 5.3 will deliver stronger, more visible place-based food environments and improved access to fresh local food.

HOW: *Delivered through supporting existing initiatives, sharing lessons across sites, and linking food-based projects with planning and place-making processes.*



Focus Area 6: **Food Knowledge & Education**

Food knowledge and education underpin long-term health, sustainability, and food system resilience. Consultation highlighted strong demand for Indigenous-led, school-based, and community food education that builds practical skills in growing, cooking, sharing, and understanding food systems. Schools and community settings were consistently identified as trusted, accessible environments where food knowledge can be embedded over time.

Across the survey, focus groups, and workshop, participants emphasised that the region already has significant activity, including school gardens, community farms, crop swaps, community kitchens, and university-led programs. However, these efforts are often fragmented, reliant on short-term funding, and not well connected to each other. Participants highlighted the need to strengthen delivery models, partnerships, and coordination so that schools and community settings function as long-term education hubs rather than one-off projects.

These issues underpin the three priority action areas outlined on the following page.

Priority 6.1
School-based food education

School-based food education is not consistently embedded or sustained, particularly in prioirity communities.

Priority 6.1 will deliver stronger, more consistent food education in schools and improved long-term impact.

HOW: *Delivered through reviewing existing programs, supporting schools to adapt proven models, and identifying funding and partnership opportunities.*

Priority 6.2
Community as food education hubs

Community-based food education is active but fragmented and not well connected across the region.

Priority 6.2 will deliver more connected, visible, and sustained community-based food education.

HOW: *Delivered through profiling existing initiatives, facilitating knowledge exchange, and supporting collaboration between community organisations.*

Priority 6.3
Coordinated food education pathways

Food education, training, and employment pathways are not well connected across systems.

Priority 6.3 will deliver clearer, more coordinated pathways linking education, skills, and employment in the food system.

HOW: *Delivered through mapping existing pathways, engaging education and industry partners, and identifying opportunities to better connect training with employment.*



Cross-cutting Actions

Cross-cutting actions underpin all six focus areas. They are designed to create the coordination, visibility, and leadership capacity required to deliver the Action Plan. Without these cross-cutting functions, progress across individual focus areas will remain fragmented and short-term.

Why this matters

Together, these cross-cutting actions address a core message that arose during the consultation: “the region does not lack ideas, it lacks coordination, sustained leadership, and shared infrastructure to support action”. Establishing clear communication channels, shared platforms, advocacy mechanisms, and a dedicated coordination role will create the conditions needed to deliver outcomes across all six focus areas.

- Establish governance structure for the delivery of this Action Plan
- Develop a business plan to scope a regional food systems coordination role
- Establish working groups for each of the six focus areas
- Develop a regional food systems communication strategy
- Convene an annual Illawarra Shoalhaven Food Forum
- Develop a high-level regional food systems advocacy agenda



Advocacy Agenda

The advocacy agenda will focus on influencing policy and funding reforms that strengthen healthy, sustainable, and locally embedded food systems. It will identify key advocacy opportunities and develop campaigns across multiple domains. While additional advocacy actions are included within the six focus areas, the priorities below represent cross-cutting system levers that require coordinated regional action to influence regional, state and federal policy.

The implementation of the advocacy agenda and associated actions aims to shift the food security focus from short-term 'buffering' solutions towards longer-term 'transformative' solutions whereby the local food network becomes resilient, dynamic and diversified.

Advocacy Strategies:

- Coordinate advocacy activities related to the food system
- Build political champions
- Deliver a coordinated regional advocacy strategy
- Attract sustained funding to implement actions in this plan

Advocacy Priorities:

- Create healthy food environments and protection from harm
- Foster food knowledge, education, and public space
- Expand local food production including streamlining approval processes to protect agricultural land
- Invest in community-based services that provide food relief

How we developed this plan

The Illawarra Shoalhaven Food Futures Taskforce (Taskforce) was established in 2024 to provide regional leadership and coordination on food systems issues. This was followed by the development of a Food Charter for the Illawarra Shoalhaven region (Food Charter). The Food Charter articulates a shared vision, purpose, and six strategic directions for food actors in the region to focus their efforts to work towards a healthier, more equitable, resilient, and sustainable regional food system. The Food Charter was informed by original research and available relevant evidence, including locally focused case studies of actors, existing projects and businesses across the entire sector.

The Food Charter clearly identified what was needed to improve access of all residents to healthy, affordable, sustainable, and culturally appropriate food by building a resilient and equitable food system and highlighted areas for economic, environmental and social impacts. However, turning these directions into priorities and time-defined practical actions needed input from the individuals, communities, businesses, organisations and agencies who would play a key role in taking these forward.

This Action Plan is the result of listening, collaboration, and refinement of feedback gathered through each stage of the consultation process. Informed by the goals of the Food Charter, the actions presented in this Action Plan represent ideas that have been reviewed, narrowed, and strengthened over time, allowing the move from broad aspirational suggestion to realistic, place-based actions that can be progressed through coordinated effort.

This staged process ensured that the resulting Action Plan is grounded in broad community input and shaped by practical considerations of delivery, governance, and sustainability. The resulting actions are presented across the six focus areas to provide a coordinated and realistic pathway for delivering the vision set out in the Food Charter.

How we consulted with key stakeholders:

The Taskforce embarked on a three-phased consultation process with stakeholders from across the Illawarra Shoalhaven food system that included: (1) a regional survey; (2) targeted focus group discussions, and (3) a face-to-face action planning workshop. The Taskforce worked collaboratively with Sustain: The Australian Food Network (Sustain) on the development of the Action Plan. Sustain is a not-for-profit organisation with expertise in consulting with communities to develop a strategic approach to strengthen local food systems. They guided the three-phase process, including facilitating the focus groups and workshop, conducting preliminary data analysis and reviewing the final Action Plan.

Key messages from the consultation

Throughout the consultation process, several consistent messages were heard across the community and food system actors:

- There is strong consensus that the **time for coordinated action is now.**
- Proposed actions are **diverse and sector-specific,** reflecting the different roles and capacities across the food system.
- There is an ongoing need to **connect and build understanding across sectors.** One of the challenges is that the food system is fragmented across different levels of government, sectors and places.
- Meaningful progress will require coordinated **leadership, governance, sustained funding, and cross-cutting support.**

Some ideas from the survey, focus groups and action planning workshop may not be individually captured here, as we have tried to reflect the broader and common priorities we heard in a way that provides clear direction while allowing scope for flexibility in a changing context. However, we have documented the full set of insights we gathered through the research and consultation process, so that working groups can draw on these details when implementing actions.

This Action Plan aims to prioritise actions that are achievable, strategic, and capable of being delivered through collaboration, while also identifying longer-term advocacy priorities. Sustainable funding will be required to implement this plan.







Stage 1 Survey:
Setting direction and ambition

107
participants

Stage 2 Focus Groups:
Moving to place-based priorities

16
participants in five sector-based sessions

Stage 1 Survey: Setting direction and ambition

The regional survey was completed by 107 cross-sectoral stakeholders (government, health, education, community, research, primary production, retail, hospitality) from across all four local government areas (Kiama, Shoalhaven, Shellharbour and Wollongong), capturing broad community priorities and aspirations. Respondents strongly supported:

- Embedding food into planning, policy, and public spaces.
- Expanding Indigenous-led and school-based food education.
- Investing in local food production through training, regulatory reform, and funding.
- Strengthening coordinated local food networks, food hubs, and school-based food access points.

Survey responses were often ambitious and future-focused. These were summarised to be sector-specific and provided the basis for the Stage 2 targeted focus group discussions.

Stage 2 Focus groups: Moving to place-based priorities

The focus groups shifted discussion from aspirational ideas to practical, place-based actions. A total of 16 stakeholders participated in five focus group sessions, each with a sector-based focus: (i) primary production, (ii) community, (iii) governance, (iv) health / education and (v) agritourism / retail / hospitality. Participants consistently prioritised:

- Building stronger partnerships between councils, community organisations, producers, and schools.
- Making better use of existing infrastructure, including food hubs, community spaces, urban farms, and education sites.
- Prioritising education, skills, and engagement pathways that connect food with health, employment, and local economic development.
- Strengthening coordination, governance, and system-level support rather than relying on one-off initiatives.
- Balancing region-wide coordination and action with hyper-local and place-based approaches.

These discussions helped refine the field of potential actions and clarified where effort would have the greatest impact.

Stage 3 Action Planning Workshop:
Translating priorities into delivery

42
participants

Stage 3 Action planning workshop: Translating priorities into delivery

Outcomes from the one-day action planning workshop translated survey and focus group findings into a staged roadmap for delivery. The task at hand for the workshop was to sequence and refine draft actions to achieve the Food Charter's goals by identifying short-, medium-, and long-term priorities within each of the Food Charter's six focus areas. While new ideas continued to emerge, workshop participants were encouraged to:

- Identify anything else already happening which draft actions could connect to or build on.
- Review and refine the draft actions to make them more implementable.
- Identify who might be best placed to lead specific actions.
- Give advice on potential governance and coordination structures required.
- Assess how initiatives could be realistically supported, resourced, and scaled over time.

Summaries of what we heard from the action planning workshop preface the actions in this plan. Beyond these, several gaps for further exploration, engagement and relationship-building were identified. This included the position and role of the Taskforce in understanding, preparing for and mitigating the impacts of climate change as it intersects with food in the region. Further engagement, relationship-building and sharing of decision-making with First Nations communities, young people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is important as this action plan evolves. Finally, some participants emphasised the importance of the community owning and driving actions, with government agencies playing a supporting role in implementing decisions which follow the lead of the community.

Next steps

Policy context and strategic alignment

This Action Plan aligns with *Feeding Australia* and the *NSW Inquiry into Food Production and Supply* by turning shared priorities for food security, resilience, sustainability and equitable access into practical regional action. We aim to align with and contribute to strategic planning opportunities within other organisations in the Illawarra Shoalhaven.

Working Groups and implementation

Working Groups will be established for each focus area to support implementation of this Action Plan. Each Working Group will be chaired by a representative from the Taskforce who will oversee the Working Group activities and report back to the Taskforce. Working Groups will comprise volunteer representatives from across the local food system who will work together to develop an Operational Plan for their focus area, drawing directly on the consultation findings, available data, research evidence and Working Group expertise. The plan will identify priority actions, key partners, roles and responsibilities, timelines, measures of progress, and opportunities to align actions with existing organisational strategies, plans and funding priorities.

Measurement and accountability

Measures of progress will be developed within the Operational Plans and reviewed through the annual Illawarra Shoalhaven Food Forum. This will include practical indicators for each focus area, drawing on available data, research, consultation findings and Working Group advice.

Data, evidence and learning

The Taskforce will continue to build the regional evidence base where resources allow, using data, research, consultation findings and lived experience to inform implementation, advocacy and future updates to the Action Plan.

2024 — **Taskforce Established**

2025 — **Food Charter Launched**

- Co-design with regional stakeholders

2026 — **Building the Foundations**

- Establish a Governance Structure
- Establish Working Groups & develop Operational Plans
- Develop a Business Plan
- Develop a Marketing & Communications Strategy
- Develop an Advocacy Agenda

WE ARE HERE

2027 — **Implement Year 1 Actions**

- Annual Food Forum

2028 — **Implement Year 2 Actions**

- Annual Food Forum

2029 — **Implement Year 3 Actions**

- Annual Food Forum

2030 — **Reflect on progress made and look ahead to next period**

Illawarra Shoalhaven FOOD FUTURES TASKFORCE

FOOD CHARTER

ACTION PLAN

- Governance Structure
- Working Groups & Operational Plans
- Business Plan
- Marketing & Comms Strategy
- Advocacy Agenda



Illawarra Shoalhaven FOOD FUTURES TASKFORCE

Illawarra Shoalhaven

FOOD FUTURES TASKFORCE

An Australian Government Initiative

Regional Development Australia ILLAWARRA SHOALHAVEN

The Illawarra Shoalhaven Food Futures Taskforce is coordinated by Regional Development Australia Illawarra Shoalhaven (RDAIS), and includes representatives from the following organisations:

University of Wollongong Australia

WRF Your Warrawong Community Centre

NSW Government

Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District

Healthy Cities Australia

CQUniversity Australia

Good360 BRINGING GOOD TOGETHER

University of Newcastle

Lifeline South Coast

community INDUSTRY GROUP

This Action Plan was developed in collaboration with Sustain: The Australian Food Network

SUSTAIN the Australian food network

If you have any questions, suggestions, or would like to be involved in the implementation of this plan, please contact RDAIS:

www.rdais.com.au
admin@rdais.com.au

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Thank you