



**MIDCOAST**  
council



# **MIDCOAST AGEING STRATEGY 2022-2026**

**MARCH 2022**



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and live, the Gathang-speaking people and pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now reside in the MidCoast Council area. We extend our respect to Elders past and present, and to all future cultural-knowledge holders.

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# INTRODUCTION

**MidCoast Council is delighted to present its first Ageing Strategy, which sets out a clear direction for enriching the lives of our valued older residents into the future.**

While governments everywhere are planning for the needs of ageing populations, here on the MidCoast, where over 65s make up almost one third of our population, we have some unique challenges to consider.

We are home to a higher than average proportion of older people, whose needs are complicated by distance between communities and facilities, limited options for transport, difficulty accessing specialist medical services, among many other factors. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these challenges. While it has impacted everyone, young and old alike, we understand that older people can often be more vulnerable and socially isolated during times of crisis and uncertainty.

In this first Ageing Strategy, we've explored the things that matters most to our older residents, and have identified the ways in which a range of government and support agencies can work together to better provide and plan for the needs of this important segment within our community.

This strategy sets some strong foundations for sustaining the valuable contributions older people make across the MidCoast region.

# OUR COMMUNITY

The MidCoast region is located on the mid-north coast of NSW, about 3.5 hours north of Sydney by road, and 2 hours north of Newcastle.

- The region spans more than 10,000 square kilometres, boasts 190km of pristine coastline, and is well-known for its diverse range of natural features including national parks, rivers, lakes and estuaries, littoral rainforests, low-lying wetlands, and rich agricultural farmlands.
- Home to over 90,000 residents our population density of just 0.09 people per hectare falls well below that of Greater Sydney which sits at 4.34. <sup>1</sup>
- We are an ageing population.
- In 2016, almost 27,000 people were aged 65 years and above, representing 29% of the total population, in comparison to other regional areas within NSW which average 20%.
- Data collated in 2015 showed Tea Gardens-Hawks Nest and Tuncurry, both located within the region, as having the first and second oldest median ages in the state. <sup>2</sup>



## People aged 65+ years

MidCoast: **29.9%**

Regional NSW: **20.4%**

Hawks Nest - Tea Gardens: **46.0%**

Tuncurry: **43.9%**

Forster South - Green Point: **42.4%**



## Older, single-person households

MidCoast: **15.5%**

Regional NSW: **12.0%**

Tuncurry: **22%**

Forster South -Green Point: **21.8%**

Gloucester: **20.4%**



## People in need of assistance

MidCoast: **8.2%**

Regional NSW: **6.2%**

Tuncurry: **11.3%**

Bulahdelah - Central Rural: **10.3%**

Forster South - Green Point: **9.6%**

<sup>1</sup> ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2016

<sup>2</sup> ABS, Regional population by age and sex, 2019

# LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Population forecasting predicts that as the MidCoast population grows, the number of residents aged 65 years and over will increase by 4.5%, from 26,683 to 37,973, by 2036. The graph to the right shows this age group will also continue to make up a large proportion of our population into the future.<sup>3</sup>

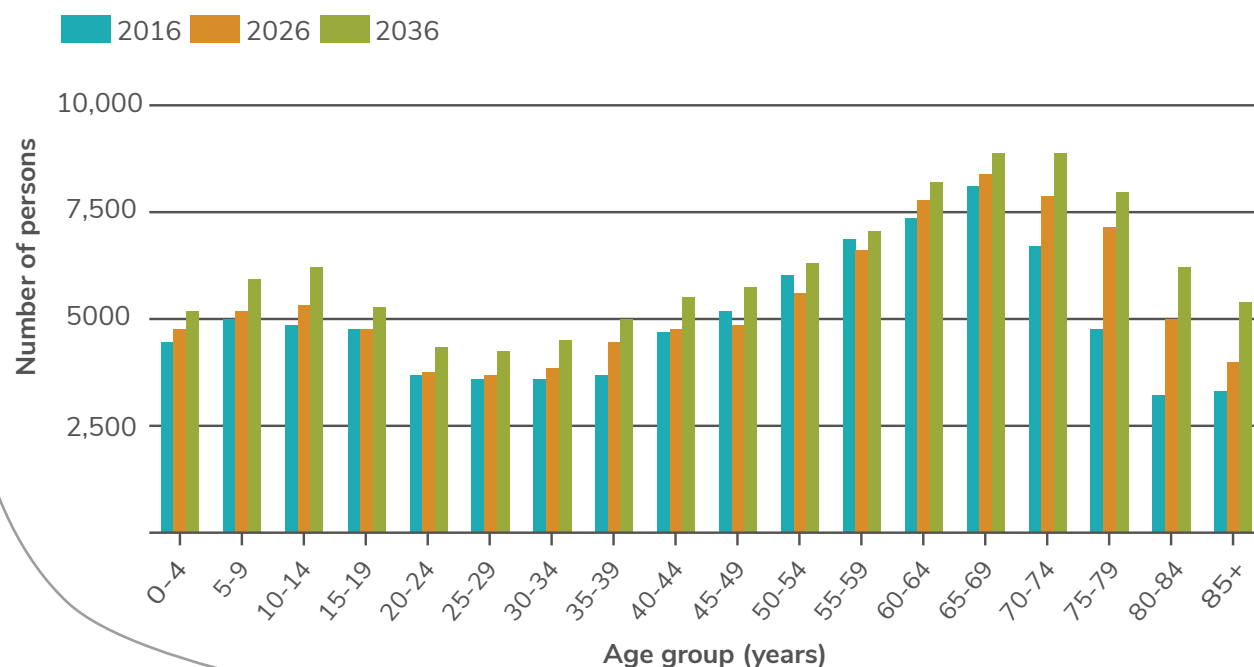
The data indicates our region has an ageing population, and this is unlikely to change in the near future. In order to deliver effective outcomes for this demographic and to meet community expectations, careful consideration must be applied to the opportunities and barriers faced by this group.

The MidCoast Ageing Strategy 2022-2026 has been designed to do just this.

Using feedback gathered during an extensive consultation program earlier this year, a comprehensive action plan has been developed to guide the creation of an age-friendly community within the MidCoast region.

Delivery against our objective of an age-friendly environment requires a holistic approach, across multiple sectors, including Council, community organisations and the healthcare sector. This strategy outlines objectives for the next four years, those responsible for delivery, those that can help with delivery, and measurable outcomes.

**Forecast age structure - 5 year age groups**  
MidCoast Council - Total persons



<sup>3</sup> Population and household forecasts, 2016 to 2036, prepared by .id (informed decisions), January 2018.

# STRATEGY SCOPE

**The MidCoast Ageing Strategy has been developed to apply across the entire MidCoast and addresses residents aged 55 years and over.**

- While the United Nations traditionally defines an ageing population as people 60+ years, we extended consultation and involvement to those aged 55+ years, recognising the importance of planning and preparation in healthy ageing<sup>4</sup>.
- It is acknowledged there is no specific age at which someone becomes 'old' and everyone ages differently.
- By including a younger age bracket, we have captured the voices of those approaching their 'ageing stage' of life.

This strategy considers the broad spectrum of experiences when it comes to ageing and in turn offers a range of actions designed to help our residents with healthy ageing and living full and easy lives.

While consultation has highlighted a wide range of needs, it's important to recognise Council does not have the resources, expertise or scope to address them all without the active involvement of other government and support agencies. For example, identified gaps and issues relating to the provision of health services would be best served as a responsibility of NSW Health, and public transport shortfalls as a responsibility of Transport NSW.

Our role throughout the implementation of the Strategy, however, will be to advocate for improvements to support and services that have been identified but fall outside our scope.



<sup>4</sup> United Nations, World Population Ageing, 2019

# THE NSW STATE PLAN

The NSW Government released its Ageing Strategy in 2016, which it describes as a whole-of-government strategy and a whole-of-community approach. Its vision is one that we share for the people of the MidCoast: <sup>5</sup>

“People in NSW experience the benefits of living longer and enjoy opportunities to participate in, contribute to and be included in their communities”

Their strategy was renewed in 2021, with the release of the *Ageing Well in NSW: Seniors Strategy 2021–2031*.

In developing the MidCoast Ageing Strategy, consultation was undertaken in line with the five priorities identified in the NSW Ageing Strategy 2016-2020. These priorities are considered to be reflective of the needs of the target demographic across the MidCoast region, and form the basis of the objectives, strategies and actions outlined throughout the Strategy.

| Priority              | Objective   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Health and wellbeing  | Older people in NSW are encouraged to live active and healthy lives with improved physical and mental wellbeing   |
| Working and retiring  | Older people in NSW have opportunities to remain in the workforce, are financially secure and independent in retirement, and plan their finances based on their circumstances and needs |
| Housing choices       | Older people in NSW live in affordable, accessible, adaptable and stable housing  |
| Getting around        | Older people in NSW travel safely and appropriately to participate in social and economic life and access services  |
| Inclusive communities | Older people in NSW stay connected and contribute to their communities  |

<sup>5</sup> Department of Communities and Justice. NSW Ageing Strategy 2016-2020





# COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

**Extensive consultation was undertaken within the MidCoast community from January to June, 2021 to explore what's currently working well, areas that could be improved, and support or services that we need or need more of. The five priority areas taken from the NSW Government's Ageing Strategy formed the basis of our engagement.**

To maximise relevance to targeted groups within the community and ensure valuable feedback, three different surveys were made available:

- Community members aged 55+ years
- Carers and aged-care service providers
- 'Short-on-time' condensed survey

A collaborative approach to providing feedback was also encouraged through a 'Kitchen Table Conversation Kit'. This assisted community members to facilitate their own semi-structured conversations about the five priority areas. This more relaxed setting meant participants might speak more freely than in a structured Council survey, share their views more openly, and participate in an offline, friendlier environment.

A detailed summary of consultation outcomes can be found in the Engagement Outcomes Report (Attachment A).

## Who participated:

- Older residents
- Family members
- Paid and unpaid carers
- Local aged care service providers
- Council's Community Inclusion and Wellbeing Reference Group

## How you participated:

- 375 'Over 55 survey' submissions
- 34 'Carer survey' submissions
- 79 'Short-on time' survey submissions
- 4 'Kitchen Table Conversation' submissions

## Online engagement:

- 859 unique 'Have Your Say' page visits
- 3 Facebook posts from MidCoast Council's Facebook page with an average reach of 1,851 people, 1,927 impressions and 25 link clicks

## Check-in Survey

A check-in survey will be conducted in 2023 and responses compared to the baseline results from the 2021 survey. This will allow Council to measure progress and identify areas requiring focus.





# WHAT YOU TOLD US

## Health and Wellbeing

Social interactions and connections with other people, support services, health facilities and clubs of interest are important in bringing about healthy and active lifestyles and a sense of wellbeing and belonging among our older residents.

- 77% of respondents said they felt socially connected to their community
- 69% said they were not using any support services
- 32% of respondents said they could not access health services in their community
- 23% respondents said they were living with a disability

## Housing Choices

For older residents, lifestyles and sense of 'self and wellbeing' are enhanced when our home is secure, fit-for-purpose, and can be adapted to meet our future needs, allowing us to age in place for longer.

- 86% of people said they own the home they live in
- 94% of people said their housing suits their current needs
- 76% said they thought their housing would suit their needs in the future

## Working and Retiring

Maintaining connections and purpose in life after retirement, having financial independence and a healthy lifestyle are all important factors for over 65s.

- 75% of respondents said they were retired
- 77% said there were not enough employment opportunities for older people in our region

## Getting Around

Transport is a crucial connector to other people, and the services and support that older people need to maintain active and healthy lives.

- 89% of people said they use a car to get around
- 65% of respondents said footpaths/cycleways were inadequate or dangerous
- 31% people said better public transport would help them get around

## Inclusive Communities

Having the opportunity to participate in and contribute to their community in ways that suit their interests and abilities, fosters a strong sense of value and belonging in older people.

- 82% of respondents said they felt like they belong in their community
- 30% of respondents said they face discrimination due to their age

# PART 1 HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Older people in NSW are encouraged to live active and healthy lives with improved physical and mental wellbeing.

“While I’m socially connected, accessing our own doctor can be difficult, and specialist appointments require travelling outside the region”



# HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGIES

| Objectives   | Actions  | Responsible Council department   | Who else can help   | Measure  |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| <p>Reduce incidence of falls and injury across the MidCoast</p> <p>Raise awareness on how to prevent falls</p> | <p>Seek funding to conduct falls prevention programs in major towns in the MidCoast</p> <p>Deliver workshops</p>   | Community Development  | <p>MidCoast Libraries</p> <p>Local Health providers</p> <p>Aged Care Services</p> <p>Retirement Villages</p> <p>Nursing Homes</p> | Evaluation of workshops indicates improved awareness   |
| NSW Health is more aware of consumer experience  | <p>Council officers are a conduit for information between community and NSW Health</p> <p>Council officers are active participants at Health Advisory Committee Meetings across the MidCoast</p> | Community Development  | NSW Health  | <p>Attend at least 70% of these meetings</p> <p>Hear fewer complaints</p> <p>Reports from NSW Health show increased patient satisfaction</p> |
| Promote opportunities for Creative Ageing activities   | <p>Seek funding where appropriate for health and wellbeing programs</p> <p>Identify and promote existing activities</p> <p>Facilitate the establishment of an Ageing Network</p>                 | <p>Community Development</p> <p>Other departments, where appropriate</p> | <p>Community groups where appropriate</p> <p>MidCoast Libraries</p> <p>Arts Mid North Coast</p> <p>Art Gallery</p>                | <p>Ageing network is established</p> <p>Program of Creative Ageing activities is developed and promoted</p>                                  |
| Community desire is reflected in the Open Space and Recreation Strategy (OSRS)                                 | Consultation is conducted with community   | Community Spaces   | <p>Community members</p> <p>Volunteer groups</p> <p>Sporting group</p>  | <p>OSRS is developed and adopted</p> <p>MCC open spaces meet best practice guidelines</p>  |
| The environment in the MidCoast meets the needs of people living with dementia                                 | Investigate the feasibility of reinvigorating the Dementia Friendly Towns Project  | Community Development  | <p>Health Service Providers</p> <p>Chambers of Commerce</p> <p>Dementia Australia</p>   | Feasibility investigation completed; if feasible, committee established  |



## HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGIES (CONTINUED)

| Objectives                                    | Actions   | Responsible Council department | Who else can help   | Measure  |
|---|---|--------------------------------|---|--|
| Educating community on ageism and its impacts | Media campaign to educate community<br>Work with business and community groups to promote the value of older people and leverage their knowledge and experience | Community Development          | Health Service providers<br>Chambers of Commerce<br>Community groups<br>Service clubs<br>Charities<br>Sporting groups | Media campaign is conducted<br>2-year check in survey shows increased satisfaction from 2021 baseline survey |



# PART 2 WORKING AND RETIRING

Older people in NSW have opportunities to remain in the workforce, are financially secure and independent in retirement, and plan their finances based on their circumstances and needs.

“I’ve joined clubs and other activities since retirement, but it would be better if I had work”



## WORKING AND RETIRING STRATEGIES

| Objectives   | Actions  | Responsible Council department | Who else can help  | Measure  |
|--|--|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Increase opportunities for older people to participate in community life | Continue to promote volunteering opportunities within Council and the community                                      | Entire MidCoast Council        | Charities<br>Service providers<br>Service clubs<br>Sporting groups                       | 2-year check in survey shows increased satisfaction from 2021 baseline survey<br>Increase in numbers of volunteers |
| Build capacity within local businesses and community groups              | Explore opportunities for older people to mentor businesses and community groups to pass on knowledge and experience | Economic Development           | Chambers of Commerce<br>Local businesses<br>Community groups<br>Educational institutions | Number of businesses or community groups matched with mentor   |

A man wearing a tan hat and a blue plaid shirt is watering a garden with a green hose. The scene is set outdoors with trees and grass in the background, illuminated by warm, golden light. The man is seen from the side, focused on his task.

# PART 3 HOUSING CHOICES

Older people in NSW live in affordable, accessible, adaptable and stable housing

“The garden and upkeep on the house may eventually get too much to manage and I’ll need to think about something smaller with less land to maintain”





# HOUSING CHOICES STRATEGIES

| Objectives   | Actions   | Responsible Council department | Who else can help | Measure   |
|--|---|--------------------------------|-------------------|---|
| Promote affordable, accessible and adaptable housing for our ageing population                   | Develop planning controls for the MidCoast that meet the objectives | Land Use Planning              |                   | MidCoast Local Environmental Plan and Development Control Plan drafted by 2023<br>Implement the MidCoast Housing Strategy into the new MidCoast planning controls |
| Ensure seniors' housing and public-use facilities comply with relevant standards and regulations | Review Development Applications with objective in mind              | Development Assessment         |                   | Number of referrals and Development Applications assessed   |



# **PART 4** **GETTING AROUND**

Older people in NSW travel safely and appropriately to participate in social and economic life and access services

“There is a need for public transport, especially on weekends, and cycle/walking paths should be designed so you don’t have to cross or ride on busy roads”



## GETTING AROUND STRATEGIES

| Objectives   | Actions  | Responsible Council department                       | Who else can help                                 | Measure   |
|--|--|--|---|---|
| <p>Footpath safety and connectivity are improved</p> <p>Opportunities for active transport are improved and promoted</p> | <p>Seek funding for additional works not identified in the Pedestrian Access and Mobility Plan (PAMP)</p> <p>Continue to consult with the community to identify improvements</p> | Transport Assets                                     | <p>State Government</p> <p>Federal Government</p> | <p>Works program identified in the PAMP is implemented</p> <p>Number of appropriate funding opportunities applied for</p> <p>Improvements are identified by community</p> |
| <p>Older people travel safely around the MidCoast</p>  | <p>Workshops, public education and community engagement are delivered to improve road safety for older people</p>  | Transport Assets                                     | Service NSW                                       | Road safety continues to be promoted  |
| <p>Public transport meets the community's needs</p>  | <p>Advocate to Transport NSW for improvements as identified</p>  | <p>Community Development</p> <p>Transport Assets</p> | State and Federal Government                      | Advocacy occurs as appropriate  |



“People in our community are generally helpful but there is a lack of knowledge and sometimes discrimination when it comes to dementia”

# **PART 5** **INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES**

Older people in NSW stay connected and contribute to their communities

# INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES STRATEGIES

| Objectives   | Actions   | Responsible Council department   | Who else can help  | Measure  |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| Social connection is increased   | <p>Consult with community to identify needs</p> <p>Seek funding to continue to offer programs through MidCoast Libraries.<br/>For example: Tech Savvy Senior, Knitting groups, Writing groups</p> <p>Seek funding for programs to teach older people new skills</p> | MidCoast Libraries   | <p>Friends of Great Lakes Library</p> <p>TAFE</p> <p>Telecommunications providers for example Telstra and Optus</p>          | <p>Needs are identified through consultation</p> <p>Funding applications are successful</p> <p>Participation rates</p>                           |
| Provide opportunity for community members who are unable to visit their local library, to access library services                        | Provide Home Library services to community through delivery of books, large print books, audiobooks, CDs, DVDs and magazines  | MidCoast Libraries   | Volunteers   | <p>Number of community members signed up for this service</p> <p>Satisfaction rates</p>  |
| Older people and their families receive assistance through My Aged Care  | Partner with service providers to run information sessions on My Aged Care  | Community Development  | <p>Local Service providers</p> <p>Neighbourhood Centres</p>  | <p>Number of sessions run per year, across the MidCoast</p> <p>2-year check in survey shows increased satisfaction from 2021 baseline survey</p> |
| Facilities provide opportunity for older people to participate actively in their community   | <p>Consultation to identify needs</p> <p>Seek funding opportunities to improve facilities</p>   | Community Spaces Engineering   | <p>Community groups</p> <p>Sporting groups</p> <p>Volunteer groups</p>   | <p>Consultation results in identified needs</p> <p>Number and extent of improvements made</p> <p>Funding applications submitted</p>              |
| A comprehensive Seniors Festival program provides opportunities for older people to participate in a range of activities, across the LGA | <p>Seek funding to develop a comprehensive program for Seniors Festival, annually</p> <p>Partner with community groups to deliver activities during Seniors Festival</p>  | <p>Community Development</p> <p>MidCoast Libraries</p> <p>Manning Entertainment Centre</p> <p>Art Gallery</p> <p>Natural Systems</p> | <p>Service providers</p> <p>Community Organisations</p> <p>Sporting groups</p> <p>Volunteer groups</p> <p>Service groups</p> | <p>Comprehensive program developed and delivered</p> <p>Funding secured</p> <p>Partnerships are formed</p> <p>Participation rates</p>            |

# INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES STRATEGIES (CONTINUED)

| Objectives   | Actions   | Responsible Council department  | Who else can help   | Measure   |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| Businesses are accessible and inclusive to everyone, including older people                    | Support businesses to ensure they are physically accessible and inclusive   | Economic Development<br>Destination Management  | Chambers of Commerce  | Businesses are supported and willing to improve   |
| The Community Directory is the go-to site for community information                            | Continue to promote the Community Directory<br>Provide assistance to community groups and members in accessing the directory<br>Explore the feasibility of developing a Seniors tile on Community Directory | MidCoast Council wide<br>Engagement, Communication and Education<br>Community Development | Service providers<br>Community members and groups<br>My Community Directory | Percentage increase of community directory listings and viewings  |
| The MidCoast is accessible and inclusive to everyone, including older people                   | Community Inclusion and Wellbeing Reference group (CIWRG) continues to raise awareness of access and inclusion needs  | Community Development<br>Community Inclusion and Wellbeing Reference group                | Dementia Australia  | Number of opportunities identified, and activities undertaken<br>2-year check in survey shows increased satisfaction from 2021 baseline survey                        |
| Provide opportunity for older people to engage in existing clubs<br><br>Boost club memberships | Investigate the feasibility of 'Come and Try' Days at clubs   | Community Development   | Local sporting clubs<br>Social Clubs<br>Craft Groups<br>Volunteer groups    | Feasibility investigated and if feasible, planning commenced<br>Participation rates<br>Club memberships increase  |
| Council Staff assist community using appropriate mechanisms                                    | Council staff understand the needs of community members<br>Explore training opportunities to assist Customer Service staff to better understand the needs of community members                              | MidCoast Council wide<br>Customer Service<br>MidCoast Libraries<br>Destination Management |   | Processes and policies are continually reviewed and developed to meet the emerging needs of an ageing community<br><br>Community knows how to access Council Services |



## INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES STRATEGIES (CONTINUED)

| Objectives  | Actions  | Responsible Council department                                  | Who else can help | Measure   |
|---|--|---|-------------------|---|
| Provide information and raise awareness of Destination Management resources, webinars and workshops | Regularly promote Destination Management resources on Council's website<br>Broad publicity regarding upcoming workshops and webinars | Engagement, Communication and Education<br>Economic Development |                   | Increased visitation to relevant section of Council's website<br>Increase in participation in workshops |
| Reach a wider audience/percentage of the community with Council's e-newsletter                      | Continue promotion of Council's e-newsletter   | Engagement, Communication and Education                         |                   | Increase subscribers to the e-newsletter  |

# IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

To support implementation of this strategy, action plans will be developed on an annual basis in consultation with key stakeholders. These action plans will detail priority areas for action, responsible parties, timeframes for completion and performance indicators for each financial year of the plan. To support flexibility and the delivery of meaningful and achievable outcomes, these annual action plans will be developed for each new financial year in the preceding quarter.

Actions that are the responsibility of Council will be incorporated into Council's Operational Plans and linked to the Delivery Program. The Operational Plan is Council's annual plan, including the individual projects and activities to be undertaken in that year to achieve the Delivery Program. The Delivery Program outlines Council's commitments and focus areas over a four-year period in order to deliver on the objectives and strategies the community has outlined in the Community Strategic Plan. Progress will be reported annually to Council and a check-in survey will be conducted and evaluated in 2023 to check progress against the 2021 survey outcomes.







## THANKYOU

Preparing the first Ageing Strategy for the MidCoast region has been a collaborative effort, and MidCoast Council would like to thank all community members who took time to complete and share the survey, host kitchen table conversations, provide verbal feedback, and participate in the engagement process. Without this valuable input from individuals, organisations and community groups, the Ageing Strategy would not exist and its success will ultimately be attributed to you all.



**MIDCOAST**  
council

Yalawanyi Ganya  
2 Biripi Way  
PO Box 482  
Taree 2430  
Mon-Fri 8.30am - 4.30pm  
Tel: (02) 7955 7777