



# Lake Macquarie Activation Strategy

- Exploring connections between community and waterway
- Lessons from stakeholder engagement – what drives perceptions of estuary health, use, access and enjoyment, value
- Management implications for lake-based tourism and recreation

MAY 2022

**LAKE MACQUARIE CITY**

**umwelt**  
Environmental & Social  
Consultants

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## Acknowledgements

### Awabakal Country

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land and waters of Lake Macquarie, the Awabakal people, and pay our respects to elders past, present and future

We remember and respect the Ancestors who cared for and nurtured this Country. *Dhumaan ngayin ngarrakalu kirraanan barayidin.*

It is in their footsteps that we travel these lands and waters.  
*Ngarrakalumba yuludaka bibayilin barayida baaduka.*

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## Project Team

Umwelt prepared the Lake Activation Strategy for Lake Macquarie City Council in 2021.

The project team was a multidisciplinary partnership between Umwelt and Council's community development, recreation planning, tourism and events planning, communications and environmental staff.

Huge thanks to everyone who contributed.



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RWO

## Key points



**A city with a lake at its heart**



**The natural environment**



**A long history of water-based recreation**



**The economy of the city is changing**



**A new proactive plan to leverage natural value for social benefit and economic prosperity**



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## Slide 4

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**RW0** Can we simplify this slide? As in - leave the icons and the subheads in blue, but remove the black text, and instead have Pam talk to that?

Rebecca Wilkinson, 2022-05-25T03:31:13.976

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## Lake Activation Strategy – Aim and Scope

*Enhance the connection of people to Lake Macquarie and its foreshore, through provision of safe, equitable and fit for purpose infrastructure and facilities that encourage recreational use and attract visitors*

- A transparent and strategic framework, with rationale, priorities, and measurable performance: for lake based recreational land use planning and aquatic infrastructure on public foreshore land
- Build on and integrate
- Bridge communication and strategy gaps
- Balance
- Accommodate and adapt
- Strengthen social and economic relationship
- Secure funding



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## LAS Engagement Program – why?

- Headline values of the lake and foreshore are well known – challenge is to translate high level value statements into a strategic framework and practical actions, linked into IP&R
- Understand the scope of current use and future aspirations for use of the lake and foreshore
- Understanding community perspectives on what contributes to or detracts from value, constraints and opportunities for change in council's approach to lake-based recreation and tourism – the lifestyle values of the waterway
- Test ideas about economic development opportunities, including major events – on and beside the lake

Respondents included:

All parts of council and the community (biggest groups from lakeside suburbs around the northeast to northwest)

Newcastle LGA, Central Coast, Cessnock, mid and upper Hunter Valley and Sydney



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## Slide 5

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**RW0** We could simplify this further by placing emphasis on the key actions

Rebecca Wilkinson, 2022-05-25T03:53:52.266

# About Lake Macquarie and its community

- Population:
  - 209,000** (now); an older community
  - 232,000** in 2041
- Population distribution:
  - 59%** in north-east and north-west
  - 28%** west
  - 13%** east
- Growth areas: north-west and south-west
- Strong local focus of town centres; variable lake connectivity
- Foreshore reserves and infrastructure for recreation and events
- Visitors (from within Australia):
  - 50%** from the Hunter region
  - 30%** from Sydney
  - 70%** of visits are day trips




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# About Lake Macquarie and its community

**Safety and amenity for boating**

**Natural advantages**  
Low tidal range and limited currents across most of the Lake  
A wide and deep central basin (11-13 m deep) offers plenty of space and the long fetch creates steady wind conditions for sailing  
Low surrounding hills and an open western aspect provide both steady and reliable winds for all types of sail sailing, as well as sheltered areas for protected mooring  
Elongated and sheltered bays for peaceful kayaking, rowing and fishing

**Management challenges**  
Long south to north fetch means south facing shorelines are exposed to short and high wind waves  
Recreational users in small boats must be vigilant about wind changes and some boat ramps are dangerous in choppy conditions  
Foreshore infrastructure faces future risks from inundation associated with sea level rise  
Shallow bays (such as Burners Bay) are not suitable for larger vessels such as big cruisers and ferries  
Navigability to sea for high winds and those with deeper levels is constrained by shallow channel depth in the vicinity of Swan Bay



**Natural treasures**

**Natural advantages**  
Strong tidal exchange at the lake's entrance results in clear ocean quality water over a sandy bed  
Channel shoals and islands created from dredged sand offer a distinct and highly valued recreational environment  
Diverse habitats, such as seagrass beds, rocky shores, reefs and wetlands support a variety of lake fauna, and great recreational fishing, scuba diving and snorkelling  
Protected seagrass communities extend around all shallow shoals of the lake  
Lake shores and floodplains include 2,300 ha of wetlands providing habitat for migratory and local birds  
Large areas of bushland catchment and foreshore in the west and south, with peaceful and secluded waterways  
Access to the ocean with great beaches and spectacular headlands nearby

**Management challenges**  
Low tidal exchange and range at the top end of the lake combined with limited currents can negatively impact water quality  
Main creek delta areas (particularly in the north) are strongly influenced by catchment discharges, including contamination, sediment load and associated poorer water quality  
Accumulation of fine sediment on the creek deltas creates shallower bays and also potential for rapid recolonisation of bed sediments in windy conditions  
Shallow shorelines with seagrass communities are vulnerable to disturbance by ramp movements, boat keels dragging on the bed and propeller scour  
Shorelines exposed to long wind fetch may be vulnerable to shoreline erosion



**Strong cultural heritage**

**Natural advantages**  
Hidden from the shell fishing and fishing of the Awabakal people lie all around the shoreline  
Lake Macquarie has unique contact records of cultural practices, language and stories, covering important islands, creeks and headlands  
Many lakeside communities have been built on a heritage of aquatic recreation and relaxation  
State listed military heritage at the former RAAF Flying Boat 'Catalina' Base at Rathmines

**Management challenges**  
Cultural heritage assets require special protection, which may conflict with recreational activities in some areas



**Public land on the foreshore**

**Natural advantages**  
We have 500 km of public land fronting the waterway managed as Council reserve, or by NSW - that's a lot of accessible waterfront bushland and park  
Many foreshore parks have great views across bays and open water  
We have the room for new ideas and growth that balance with the health of the lake

**Management challenges**  
Our long foreshore and vast area of foreshore land demands a lot of management and maintenance resources from Council  
Population growth, a low-density settlement pattern and changing employment means car transport low dominates and parking is a challenge in all economic centres




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## Access for lake use

### Foreshore parks and pathways

<b>170km</b>	Shoreline
<b>100km</b>	is public land
<b>30+</b>	Foreshore parks and reserves, with playgrounds, picnic facilities
<b>27km</b>	Foreshore shared pathways (pedestrians and cyclists)
<b>Many</b>	Informal foreshore paths and tracks

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## Infrastructure that supports lake use

### Aquatic infrastructure

<b>30</b>	Boat ramps (about 1 every 5.5km)
<b>45</b>	Public jetties and pontoons
<b>35</b>	Courtesy moorings
<b>1</b>	Fully enclosed swimming area
<b>7</b>	Marked swimming areas which exclude vessels
<b>19</b>	Fish cleaning tables
<b>5</b>	Marine waste transfer facilities

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## Infrastructure that supports lake use

### Boating and storage

<b>20,000</b>	Vessel registrations	<b>60</b>	Hard stand storage
<b>35,000</b>	Boat licences	<b>35</b>	Dry stack storage at marinas and yacht clubs
<b>6</b>	Marinas	<b>4</b>	Dinghy storage racks
<b>10</b>	Amateur sailing clubs	<b>Many</b>	Dinghies and kayaks stored informally in foreshore reserves
<b>2</b>	Commercial yacht clubs		
<b>2509</b>	Private moorings		
<b>263</b>	Commercial moorings		
<b>500</b>	Wet berths		

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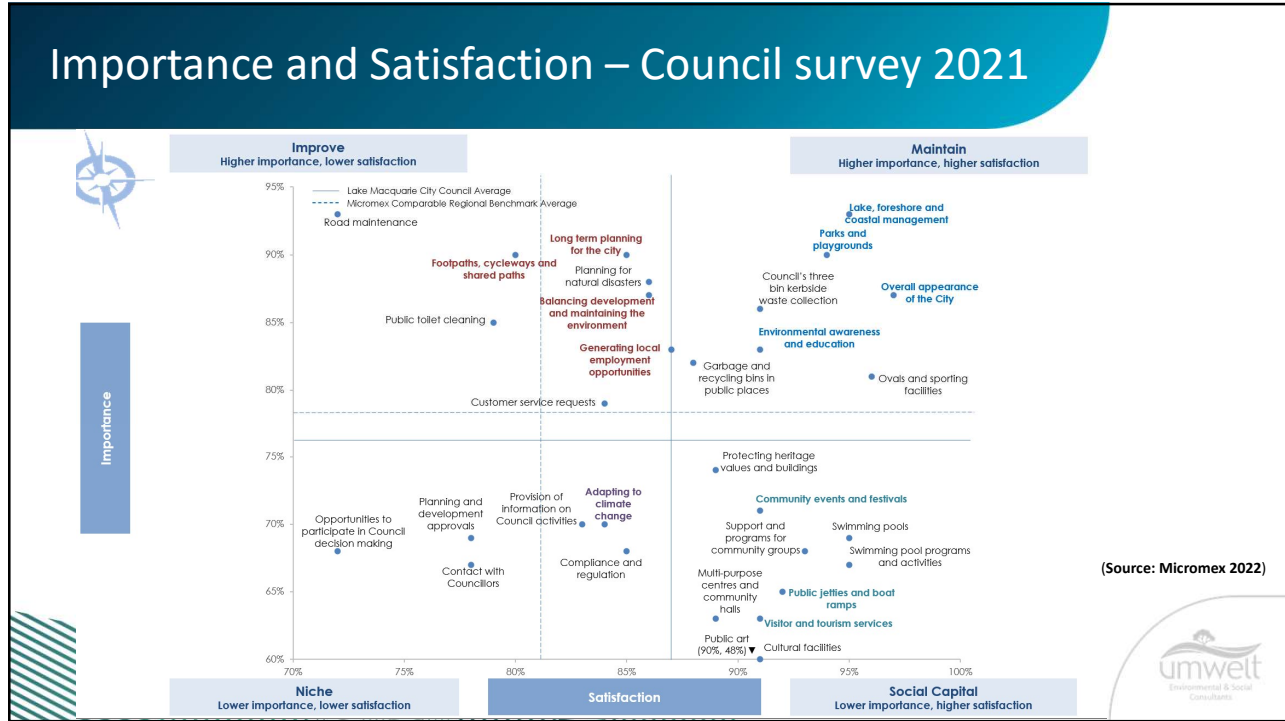
## Community perspectives - context

Regular Council surveys about importance and satisfaction – issues and services  
(Micromex 2020, 2021)

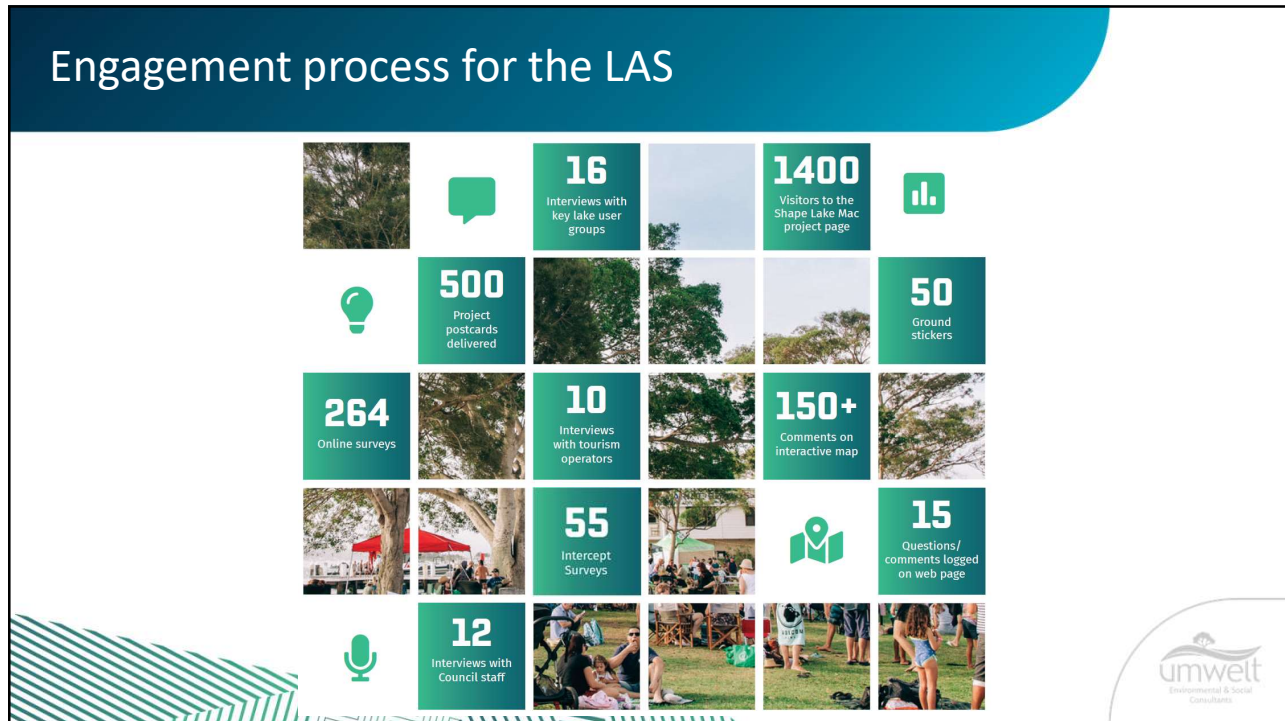
<b>Quality of Life</b>	<b>97%</b> rate as Good or Excellent	
<b>Most valued aspects of living in Lake Macquarie</b>	Natural Environment - beaches, lakes, bush	<b>48%</b>
	Outdoor Activities – walking paths, cycleways, fishing, parks	<b>9%</b>
<b>Highest priorities for Council for next 10 years</b>	Roads	<b>27%</b>
	Traffic	<b>14%</b>
	Environment and climate change	<b>12%</b>
	Parks, playgrounds and green spaces	<b>8%</b>
	Paths and cycleways	<b>8%</b>

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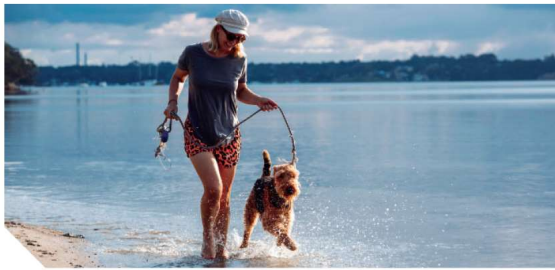


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# Important current lake-based uses

## Top 5 water-based activities

- Swimming (37%)
- Kayaking, outriggers and dragon boats (24%)
- Stand up paddle boarding (15%)
- Powerboat cruising (13%)
- Yacht sailing (11%)



## Top 5 foreshore activities

- Walking (30%)
- Dining at lake front restaurants/cafes (20%)
- Picnics or informal gatherings (19%)
- Markets/festivals (16.5%)
- Cycling (14.5%)



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# Headline findings from community input

*Lake Macquarie is a healthy waterway*

*We need more tourism attractions on Lake Macquarie and its foreshores*

*Recreation clubs and businesses want to work closely with Council*

*Improvements were suggested for dinghy storage, waste transfer stations, recreational facilities*

*Respondents asked for live music sites and more markets and festivals at our foreshore parks*

*Our marked swimming areas are popular and people would like to see more netted enclosures*








*The community would like more facilities and events for children and families including on-lake fun such as water parks, pedal boats, boat hire*

*Suggestions for more boating events were common, including sailing regattas, dragon boat races, ferry cruises to view racing and events for power boats and jet skis*

*People value the lake's natural environment for activities like bird watching and creating connections with nature*

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## Barriers to lake activation – what people said

 Limited accommodation	 Conflicting uses	 Environmental sensitivity and hazard	 Access for large vessels	 Land tenure	 Community clubs need support	 Access and accessibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holidays and major events</li> <li>• Quality of hotels</li> <li>• Holiday parks and RV camping</li> <li>• Right accommodation in the right places</li> <li>• Waterfront dining</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passive and active interactions</li> <li>• Sailing, race and cruise</li> <li>• Powerboats</li> <li>• Fishing</li> <li>• Jet skis</li> <li>• Kayaks</li> <li>• Swimming</li> <li>• Walking</li> <li>• Cycling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sea grass and wetlands</li> <li>• Sea level rise, climate change</li> <li>• Aspect, exposure and safety</li> <li>• Water quality variability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Swansea channel</li> <li>• Shallow water in some popular bays</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complexity</li> <li>• Uncertainty</li> <li>• Managing public benefits and private uses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential to attract large events</li> <li>• Need council to work with them to manage space, access, facilities, spectator options</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public transport</li> <li>• Parking (trailers, accessible for disability)</li> <li>• Wheelchair access</li> <li>• Across lake connectivity</li> <li>• Village to foreshore links</li> <li>• Paths and cycleways</li> </ul>

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## Factors influencing use and value

- Most of the population lives within **15 to 20 minutes** drive to some part of the lake foreshore
- People are **happy to travel** to get to the place that best suits their day's activity
- Lake usage data (including public use of ramps / jetties / foreshore paths) is **not robust**
- Some groups **did not respond** in anticipated numbers
- Some high-profile long-term issues **outside scope**
- **Perceptions** of water safety

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## Factors influencing support for recreation and tourism development

**Local communities** are keen to be involved in planning that affects their lives and their image of their place.

More active interest from those who are less satisfied with one of more aspect of recreation related services, and have time.

Recreation and tourism have local and whole of city dimensions - build a shared vision for a very diverse 'use' that works at all scales.

## Factors influencing support for recreation and tourism development

The community sees the intimate connection between recreational and tourism value and indicators of lake health.

Diverse social issues influence a future where recreation and leisure generate economic development:

- **Tolerance** of foreshore development; public uses of public land
- **Balancing facilities** for 'family' and 'tourism' visits. Crowds and adventure? Peaceful relaxed lifestyle
- **Matching accessibility** - equitable access, transport, with the character of the lake
- Perceived and real **safety** and navigability hazards or conflicts

## Key messages for Council

- **Pay attention** to naturalness and social activity dimensions to create the link to economic opportunity
- Lake activation includes making the most of the lake as a **scenic setting as well as the lake surface** for activities
- Activities and facilities for all ages, abilities, cultural backgrounds – **be inclusive**
- Go for **big events**, as well as more options to enhance **local** community lifestyle
- **Diversify activities** and locations – enjoy the special character of different parts of the lake and foreshore
- Still a gap between **value and knowledge** of natural systems and their vulnerability



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## Where the community's views have taken us

### LAS Vision:

*Our lake inspires our community to explore, connect, relax and be active*

#### PLAY & FUN

Our water playground



Sailing, fishing, walking and swimming have always been popular uses

Requires maintaining a healthy lake and a strong focus on local access - ramps, jetties, swimming areas, attractive parks and walking/cycling paths

#### NATURE

Conserve and connect with nature



Nature based and adventure recreation and tourism experiences

Promotes a healthy lake and surrounding bushland: sea, bush and lake combinations

Consider new bush tracks around the lake, ocean access wharf/marina outside the bridge, kayak trails, holiday park upgrades, sky diving, paragliding

#### EXCITE

Major events, innovation and action



Exciting, signature events in accessible, visible and beautiful settings - attracting people from our region and beyond

Requires investment in well designed and landscaped sites suitable for large numbers of people, wharves suitable for ferry transport and parking networks

Requires quality accommodation in proximity

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## A place-based hierarchy for activation

right uses in the right places

### Activation Precincts

Spatially integrated, functional clusters of places creating access to diverse lake-based recreation and relaxation experiences:

- Cockle Bay (Northwest)
- Croudace Bay (North)
- Swansea Channel and shores (East)
- Western Bays and Peninsulas (West)

**Level 1:**  
Local foreshores

Provide easy, inviting, low-key and equitable access to the lake and its foreshore, supporting the lifestyle of local communities

Sites are within walking distance or a 5 minute drive of most users

A network of Level 1 sites supports a Level 2 site

Level 1 facilities to be located within Level 1 locations

**Level 2:**  
District foreshores and lakeside centres

Provide distinctive district-level lakeside and on-water experiences, reflecting the special character of each area and its community

Connect lakeside commercial centres to the foreshore in recognition of existing community connections

Includes foreshore reserves that are not in centres but have capacity to support recreational opportunities for people from within a 15-20 minute drive


**Level 3:**  
Destination:

Major recreation, events and tourism sites

Provide large, flexible and well-equipped spaces in interesting and special landscape contexts, suitable for innovative and creative waterfront attractions and events

Attract visitors from the broader region, metropolitan Sydney and beyond

Multi-use sites that meet multiple criteria at a high level and offer flexibility and diversity within one area



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## A place-based hierarchy for activation

right infrastructure to support safe use and enjoyment

**Boat ramps**



**Jetties**



**Swimming**







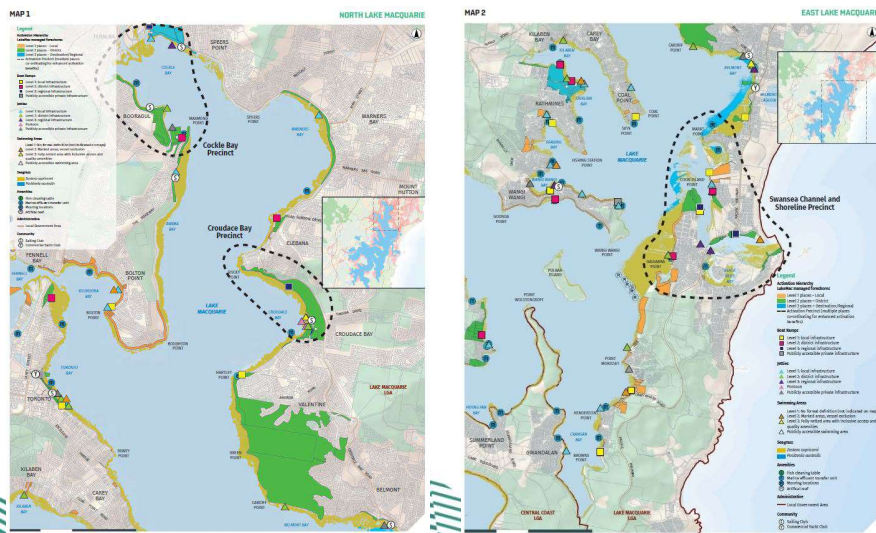
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## Facilitating economic activity and infrastructure planning

- **Targeted Council liaison**, support, planning and services to facilitate community events and recreation businesses
- **Focus for Destination Strategy**, accommodation, activity hubs and events
- **Appropriate infrastructure provision and services** – to protect sensitive lake environments, support safe access and enable use at different scales.

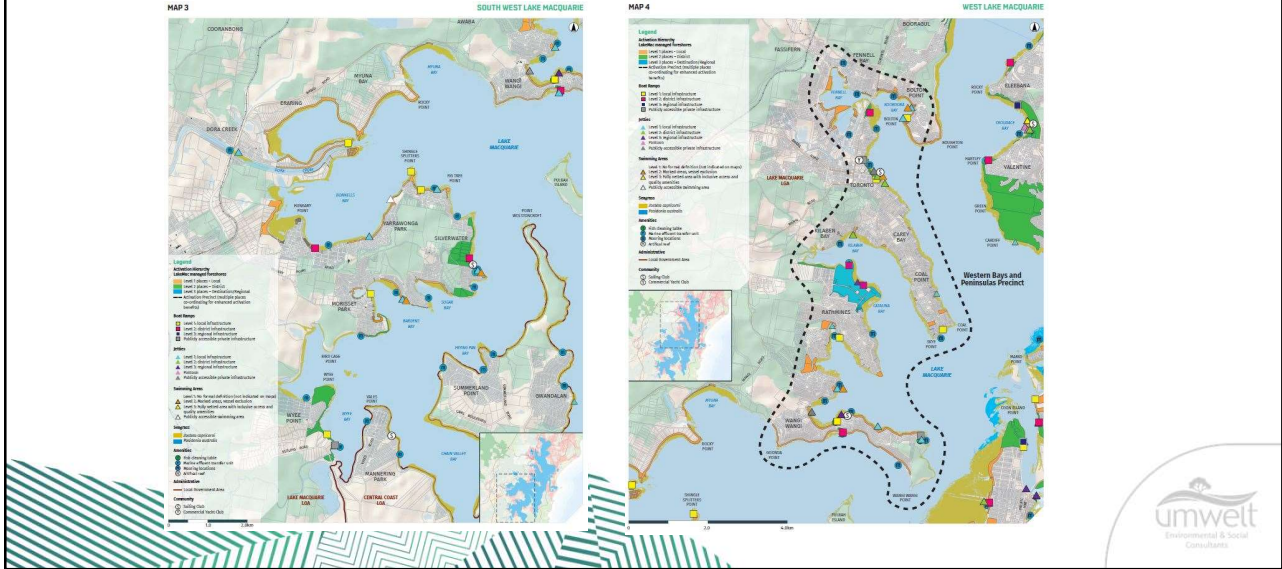
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## Strategy maps



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# Strategy maps



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