

1. INTRODUCING THIS REPORT

The name Noosa is thought to be derived from an aboriginal word *noothera* or *gnuthuru* meaning 'shade' or 'shadow'.

Noosa Shire lies at the northern extremity of the south-east Queensland region. It is the southern gateway to and forms part of the Great Sandy Region, a large natural region with its focus on the coastal lowlands and islands of the Wide Bay.

Noosa Shire is the smallest in both population and area of the three local governments that comprise the sub-region of the Sunshine Coast. The Shire has a total area of 86,823 ha including waterways.

Noosa is a special place, with a sub-tropical climate and a diverse range of distinctive landforms. Its principal and most distinctive attribute lies in its natural resource base including:

- Extensive open space network of National Parks and State Forests;
- Diverse landscapes;
- Attractive beaches and a largely undeveloped coastline north of the Noosa River; and
- Scenic hinterland displaying a mosaic of landuses.

The outstanding environmental values of Noosa include:

- A magnificent and unique coastal lake system;
- Nationally significant wetlands;
- The most healthy river estuary in south-east Queensland;
- Diverse ecosystems including rocky coastal headland;
- Significant fish habitat and fish breeding grounds;
- Coastal wallum corridor (extending south into Maroochy Shire) listed by the Australian Heritage Commission on the Register of the National Estate..

It is the mosaic, accessibility and visible presence of so many environmental landscapes in a small area which provides a rich environmental backdrop to the diverse human activities and special lifestyle which characterise living in, or visiting Noosa. The location of the Shire's settlements and townships, nestled within spectacular and significant environmental settings makes Noosa a sought after tourist destination with an increasing national and international profile.

Although the attributes of character and lifestyle are part of Noosa's attractiveness, much of their appeal is founded upon the quality and diversity of the physical environment. This is the fundamental corner stone of Noosa's wealth, making it imperative that its values and health are protected into the future.

Noosa is fortunate in having critical areas protected as National Parks. The headwaters of the Noosa River, the coastal ecosystems, the prominent Noosa headland as well as wetland, fish habitat and estuarine ecosystems have been conserved through the foresight and energy of a few campaigners, supported by the increasing community recognition that such achievements were an essential step in retaining Noosa's distinctiveness.

The extensive protected areas are the dominant reason for Noosa's high score on its first report card. However, warning signs are evident that water quality, aquatic ecosystems and increasing use of coastal areas are emerging as 'hot spots' of environmental deterioration. At present these issues are localized and manageable.

The challenge for the Noosa community is to retain and improve the current ratings, as the incremental impacts from settlement coupled with our desire for outdoor recreation in natural areas generates further pressures on the natural environment. The slow, incremental degradation of the environment, often barely perceptible over a single generation is frequently the most difficult pressure to counteract effectively. This State of Environment report goes some way to documenting the condition of the environment and developing benchmarks which can track both disturbing and positive trends.

1.1 ECOLOGICALLY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (ESD)

ESD is a concept and philosophy which is recognised and included in all recent social and environmental legislation across Australia. This trend will become more pronounced over the next decade. Put simply, it is *“development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.”* (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987)

Australia has developed a National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development, endorsed by all Australian governments (federal, state and local) in 1992. The strategy *“aims to meet the needs of Australians today, while conserving our ecosystems for the benefit of future generations.”* (CoA, 1992).

The strategy outlines three core objectives:

1. *Enhance individual and community well being and welfare by following a path of economic development that safeguards the welfare of future generations;*
2. *Provide for equity within and between generations; and*
3. *Protect biological diversity and maintain essential processes and life support systems.*

It also articulates a number of guiding principles, two of which are:

1. The need for decisions to effectively integrate long and short term economic, environmental and social considerations; and
2. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing action – known as the ‘precautionary principle’.

Although ESD may appear as a complex concept, it is becoming increasingly translated into local and day-to-day decisions for local and state governments. For Noosa, the ESD challenge revolves around how to foster a level of growth and development to ensure a prosperous economy and strong social fabric, whilst conserving the diversity and quality of the natural environment.

It also means reversing current unsustainable trends or patterns of land or resource use.

A SoE report is one element along the pathway toward achieving ESD. It establishes the current condition of the environment, identifies key pressures upon it, and suggests important actions which need to be implemented.

1.2 NOOSA’S ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT

The ecological footprint equates with the concept of carrying capacity in natural ecosystems and is defined as:

“the area of ecologically productive land needed to produce the natural resources that the (human) population consumes and to assimilate the waste (products) that the population generates, including not only the land area consumed locally but also the land area appropriated from other regions and countries through the consumption of imported products” (Wackernagel et al 1993).

Our ecological footprint includes the area of forest required to assimilate the carbon dioxide produced (through combustion of fossil fuels), the area of land occupied by the roads, buildings etc, the land needed to produce the food, beverages and tobacco consumed, the area occupied by residential backyards and the area of forest cut down to produce the timber and paper products consumed by each of us on an average annual basis.

The ecological footprint for each Australian has been calculated at 6ha, whereas there is 1.3ha of land per capita available globally (EPA, 1999).

This figure for Australia is 4 times the globally available 'fair share', which places Australia and Queensland among the top five consuming nations in the world. This highlights how unsustainable our current lifestyle really is relative to the rest of the world. By comparison, India has a footprint of 0.81ha, and Bangladesh 0.73ha per person.

It has not been possible to calculate the ecological footprint for the population of Noosa Shire, although it is reasonable to assume it closely approximates the averages for Australia and Queensland.

1.3 NOOSA'S ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT CARD SUMMARY

This report presents Noosa's first 'environmental report card'. It concentrates on the natural environment, although there is evidence to suggest that concerns are emerging about the pace of change, and the stability of the social fabric. Exploration of this theme could be introduced in future reports to reflect a more rounded assessment of a sustainable environment.

This summary report card has been collated from each of the chapters or themes, and they should be read to gain a better understanding of the issues, rationale and criteria for the assessment. It should be noted that the assessments are based on available information and the expertise of contributing authors across the various fields. They are likely to be refined over time as further information and studies lead to greater objective rigour.

Based on the information currently available on the state of Noosa's environment, Noosa has scored well in many areas. The challenge for Noosa now is to maintain these high ratings, particularly as the ratings for 'pressure' are frequently rated as 'moderate'. The assessment of pressures strongly suggest a decline in environmental condition could occur over the next few years if action is not taken now or in the near future.

A rating of the current condition and future pressures on the environment for each of the six themes assessed in this report is presented below. The ratings have been determined by :

- Applying relevant criteria (as specified in each specific theme report card summary);
- Applying the findings of recent scientific or technical studies; and
- Using the catchments, rivers and waterways assessment as a benchmark rating, as this was developed through recent scientific studies and through comparison with other estuaries in south-east Queensland.

REPORT CARD		
Theme	Current Condition	Severity of Future Pressures
Biodiversity – flora and fauna	B	Low
Catchments, Streams and Lakes	A	Moderate
Coastal Zone	B-	Moderate
Land	C	Moderate
Atmosphere	A	Moderate
Human Settlements: Waste & Transport	C	Low

Key:

Condition

- | | | | | | |
|---|---------------------|---|--------------------|---|---------------------|
| A | Very good condition | C | Moderate condition | E | Very poor condition |
| B | Good condition | D | Poor condition | | |

Noosa Population Growth at a Glance

Table 1.1 shows the Australian Bureau of Statistics data on population growth in Noosa Shire to June 1999, together with population growth figures for 2001 and 2007. Noosa Shire's estimated resident population at 30 June 1999 was 41 386, increasing from the previous year by 4%. The 2007 figure of 56 500 is based upon estimates of future development and associated population growth allowed for by the strategic plan.

Table 1.1 Population Figures and Projections

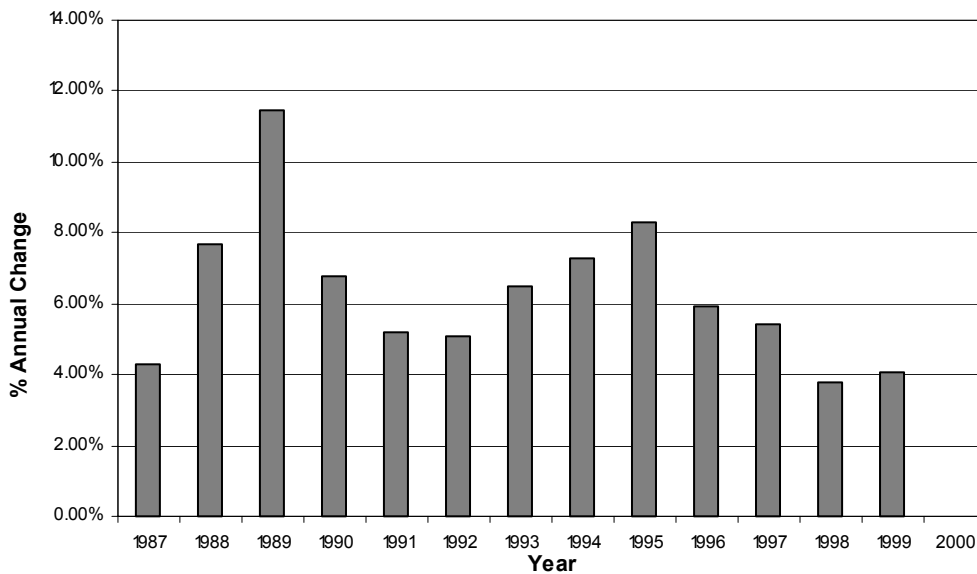
PERIOD	MEDIUM PROJECT SERIES
1986*	18 770
1991*	26 339
1996*	36 336
1999	41 386
2001 (est)	43 330
2007 (est)	56 500

(Summers 1995b)

* = census figures

The *rate of change* of population in Noosa Shire over the period 1987-1999 can be clearly seen from the graph below.

Figure 1.1 % Population Change, Noosa Shire 1987 - 1999

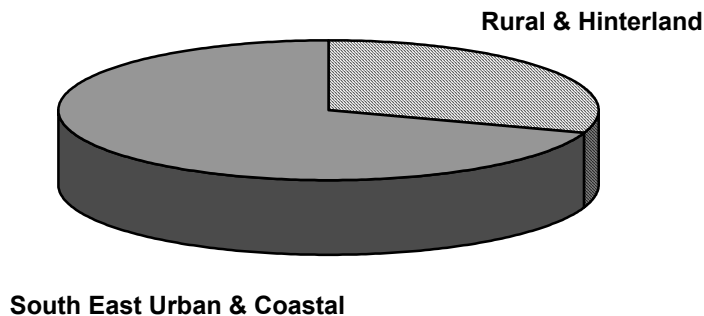


Two trends which emerge from the graph indicate:

- A steady decline in the rate of population growth since 1995, although growth continues to occur; and
- Current rates of growth are considerably lower than those experienced in the mid-late 1980's.

Population in Noosa Shire is not distributed evenly across the Shire, but rather is concentrated in the southern coastal localities of Noosa Heads/Noosaville, the Eastern Beaches and Tewantin.

The sparsely populated rural hinterland and northern coast compared with the south eastern localities is one of contrast, as the following figure indicates.

Figure 1.2 Population Distribution, Noosa Shire**Tourism**

Noosa population figures cannot be assessed adequately without also considering the impact of the transient tourist population which visits the area. The flourishing tourism industry is a distinctive feature of Noosa. Current figures show that nearly ½ million visitors visit Noosa annually.

A survey of 400 Noosa visitors undertaken in 2000 (Van Tulder) asked respondents to list what they liked about Noosa. Seven of the top 9 most frequently mentioned responses related to the values of the natural environment. Responses in order of frequency were:

1. Beach
2. Weather
3. National Park
4. Relaxed atmosphere
5. Surf
6. Restaurants
7. Views
8. River
9. Waterways

Evidence of the critical role Noosa's natural assets play in its economy is further demonstrated through a recent analysis of the economic impact of Noosa National Park. It was estimated to directly yield \$26 million to the local Noosa economy in 1998, with a total of \$34 million to the regional Sunshine Coast economy. The total amount of benefits (direct, indirect and induced effects) for the Sunshine Coast economy amounted to \$54 million, and created 797 jobs (Pearson et al, 1999).

