



2026

TIDY TOWNS AWARDS

THANK YOU TO OUR 2026 AWARDS AND EVENT SUPPORTERS



Keep Australia Beautiful NSW

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www.kabnsw.org.au

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Disclaimer

The information in this booklet has been provided by the Award nominees and referees chosen by them. Every effort has been made to present all the information contained in this booklet as accurately as possible.

Cover image: 2026 Overall Tidy Towns Award Winners, Dungog with Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor of New South Wales

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About Tidy Towns

You've likely passed through a town proudly displaying its Tidy Towns achievement sign. Since 1981, the NSW Tidy Towns program has celebrated the projects, people, and communities helping regional NSW become more sustainable, connected, and vibrant places to live.

The program recognises initiatives across a range of categories, showcasing the environmental, social, and economic contributions being made by councils, community groups, schools, businesses, and volunteers. Many of these projects are driven by passionate local volunteers and become a source of lasting community pride and cohesion.

The annual Awards weekend provides an opportunity to celebrate these achievements while bringing communities together to share ideas, experiences, and inspiration. In October 2026, the event will be hosted by Orange, following its success as the 2025 Overall Winner.

In 1990, the state Tidy Towns programs united to form the Keep Australia Beautiful Australian Tidy Towns Awards. Each year, the NSW Overall Winner has the opportunity to be nominated as the state finalist in this iconic national sustainability program.



TIDY TOWNS
SUSTAINABILITY AWARDS

About KAB NSW



Keep Australia Beautiful NSW is the premier non-profit organisation leading behaviour change by engaging the community to continually improve our local environment.

Over our 50-year history we have built a state-wide network of dedicated businesses, community groups, councils, schools and individuals assisting our causes.

We deliver many programs throughout the state to promote sustainability and reduce litter:

- Tidy Towns Sustainability Awards (regional)
- Sustainable Cities Awards (metropolitan)
- EnviroMentors® environmental education program
- Annual Conference





Message from the CEO

For 45 years, the KAB NSW Tidy Towns Awards have celebrated the people and projects making a difference across regional New South Wales. The program has grown to reflect the many ways communities are working to create more sustainable, resilient and liveable places.

This year's entries show the breadth of that work. Councils, community groups, schools, businesses and individuals have led projects that protect the environment, bring people together, celebrate local culture and heritage, and support community wellbeing. Their achievements reflect local knowledge, collaboration and a determination to turn good ideas into practical action.

This winners book shares some of the outstanding projects recognised at the 2026 awards in Orange. We hope their stories give other communities ideas they can adapt and encourage connections between people facing similar challenges across regional NSW.

On behalf of Keep Australia Beautiful NSW, I thank our partners, judges and volunteers for the time, expertise and support they contribute to the program each year. Congratulations to all our 2026 winners and finalists. Your work shows what communities can achieve when people come together to care for their towns and shape their future.



Warm regards,

Val Southam
Chief Executive and Executive Director
Keep Australia Beautiful NSW

Thank you to our 2026 Tidy Towns Awards Partners and Sponsors



AWARDS CATEGORIES



Biodiversity Conservation

The Biodiversity Conservation Award recognises outstanding projects that protect, restore or enhance native ecosystems, threatened species habitat, biodiversity corridors and ecological resilience.



Circular Economy

Sponsored by



The Circular Economy Award recognises projects that redesign systems, products, or processes to keep materials, products, fluids, or energy circulating in the economy for as long as possible. These projects go beyond recycling to create long-term circular solutions that reduce waste and maximise the value of resources.



Climate Change Mitigation & Adaptation

Sponsored by



The Climate Change Mitigation & Adaptation Award recognises projects that strengthen community resilience, reduce emissions, or sequester carbon.



Communication & Engagement

The Communication & Engagement Award recognises programs and projects that inspire and enable environmental action through effective communication and community engagement.



Local Heroes

The Local Heroes Award recognises individuals who demonstrate leadership and outstanding commitment in their community. This award celebrates those who stand out through action, inspiration, and measurable impact across environmental, sustainability, or broader community initiatives.



Plastic-Free Communities

The Plastic-Free Communities Award recognises individuals, groups, schools, or communities showing innovation and leadership in reducing single-use plastics and encouraging more sustainable choices.



Resource Recovery

Sponsored by



The Resource Recovery Award recognises projects and programs that recover, recycle, or safely manage materials that have already become waste, diverting them from landfill and supporting better waste management outcomes.



Waste Avoidance

The Waste Avoidance Award recognises projects and programs that prevent waste from being created in the first place through education, behaviour change, and practical alternatives.



Community Spirit & Inclusion

The Community Spirit and Inclusion Award recognises projects, programs, or initiatives that strengthen social connection, inclusion, participation, and community resilience.

These projects celebrate communities that come together to support one another and foster a strong sense of belonging.



Heritage & Culture

The Heritage and Culture Award recognises community projects that enhance and protect built heritage, natural heritage, or Indigenous cultural heritage.



Litter Prevention

Sponsored by



The Litter Prevention Award recognises projects or programs that reduce or prevent litter through innovative approaches with measurable outcomes.



Liveable Towns

The Liveable Towns Award recognises projects that enhance the liveability, functionality, and appeal of a town, suburb, or local area. These projects help create places that are accessible, sustainable, resilient, and enjoyable for people to live, work, and visit.



Water Conservation & Protection

The Water Conservation and Protection Award recognises leadership and innovation in water conservation and management for the future.



Young Legends (<= 25)

The Young Legend's Award celebrates individuals, school groups, or youth teams aged 25 and under who show outstanding leadership in environmental action.



Overall Award

The Overall Award recognises a regional council, town, village or regional centre that has demonstrated achievement across at least four Tidy Towns categories. Winners are selected in each population category, with one named the Overall KAB NSW Tidy Towns Winner for 2026.

POPULATION CATEGORIES

The Tidy Towns awards recognise towns of different sizes across New South Wales. Population categories allow towns to be considered alongside others with similar resources and challenges.

- > A: ≤ 1,500
- > B: 1,501 - 5,000
- > C: 5,001 - 12,000
- > D: 12,001 - 23,000
- > E: > 23,000



Peter Clark

Managing Director | Calleo Green

Peter is an environmental and cultural heritage professional with more than 30 years of experience as an assessor and judge across multiple Keep Australia Beautiful Council (KABC) programs.

He currently works in the nature repair sector coordinating on-ground cultural heritage management at a major NSW site, while continuing his dedicated work in bushfire preparedness and response.



Paula Clasby

Senior Manager, Business Development | TerraCycle ANZ

Paula is a creative, marketing, and business development professional with extensive experience supporting businesses to advance positive environmental and social change. She has worked in various sectors including health, marketing, design, print, hospitality, and over 10 years within sustainability and the built environment. Prior to TerraCycle, Paula worked with GECA (Good Environmental Choice Australia), helping individuals and businesses to advance the circular economy.

Paula prioritises purpose in all her work, drawing on her passion to drive TerraCycle's mission in Eliminating the Idea of Waste®.



Ana Corpuz

Senior Project Officer | Murray-Darling Basin Authority

Ana has over 25 years' experience in the NSW public sector, specialising in environmental and sustainability policy, project management and scientific analysis.

She currently works in the Murray-Darling Basin Authority's Basin Plan Implementation Branch and volunteers on Bayside Council's Floodplain Risk Management Committee.

Her expertise spans water and catchment management, governance, compliance and process improvement, complemented by extensive communication, stakeholder engagement, public speaking and mentoring experience.



Jeanne-Vida Douglas

Head of Innovation | Property Industry Foundation

JV is an award-winning marketer, business journalist, and author working at the intersection of sustainability, innovation, and impact.

After early roles championing sustainable solutions across start-ups, media, and professional services, she pivoted following the 2019–20 bushfires to support renewable-energy and circular-economy leaders including Nectr, 5B, and TerraCycle.

Now, as Head of Innovation at the Property Industry Foundation, she advances social sustainability and reimagines solutions to youth homelessness.



Angela Dunnett

Stormwater Compliance & Education Officer | Parramatta River Catchment Group

Angela Dunnett is an environmental education and compliance professional with experience in delivering school programs, internal change management initiatives, and community-focused sustainability programs. Angela currently works for the Parramatta River Catchment Group on education and compliance programs to improve stormwater management, such as Get the Site Right, which addresses erosion and sediment control on building sites, as well as on project management of programs to address litter prevention and improve the operation and management of water-sensitive urban design.

Angela has also worked with Sydney Water and the NSW Department of Education, designing and evaluating grants and behaviour programs around sustainability and water literacy.



Chris Jones

Design & Operations Manager | AAD Design Studio

Chris Jones is a design professional and former design business owner with experience in residential design, master planning, and project delivery. He holds a Master of Architecture and qualifications in residential energy efficiency assessment, reflecting his commitment to sustainable, climate responsive, and passive design.

Chris is passionate about creating buildings and places that are practical, accessible, and enjoyable for people to live, work, and visit. He believes the best architecture invites people to pause, explore, ask questions, and discover a deeper connection with place.



Anna Lei

PR & Communications Manager | TerraCycle ANZ

Anna Lei is a public relations professional with experience across a range of industries.

She began her career at award-winning agency Ogilvy, specialising in consumer PR and influencer marketing, working with global clients such as Netflix, Xbox, eBay and American Express.

In 2023, Anna joined the TerraCycle marketing team hoping to incorporate purpose in her work and combine her passion for environmental advocacy with her professional expertise to champion sustainability and inspire positive change. Anna drives media relations, publicity, and community outreach to inspire and educate on sustainable practices at TerraCycle.



Sarah Lynch

Project and Systems Officer | Blacktown City Council

Sarah is a dedicated Project and Systems Officer within Blacktown City Council's waste services team, experienced in leading administration teams, coordinating projects, and driving process and system improvements. My work focuses on improving operational efficiency, strengthening customer service delivery, and supporting teams through structured planning and collaborative problem solving. I'm particularly interested in initiatives that foster community wellbeing through sustainable practices and thoughtful resource management.

Beyond my professional role, I'm a passionate gardener and advocate for native gardening, committed to growing plants that belong here and welcoming the wildlife that follows.



Layla McNeil

Strategic Business Manager | Thesium

Layla has experience in environmental strategic policy development, project and contract management, program delivery, EMS auditing, stakeholder facilitation.

She has knowledge and expertise in developing and delivering strategic environmental and communication plans, cooperative agreements and contracts with multi stakeholders; educational and behaviour change campaigns; environmental auditing, waste and resource management planning; to creating, implementing, reporting and evaluating a variety of sustainability programs.

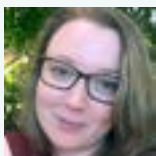


Luciano Mesiti

CEO | Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia

Luciano is the CEO of Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia, whose aim is to promote food and fibre education in schools nationally. Prior to his appointment he was a high school teacher, teaching agriculture and technology.

Luciano has extensive experience in curriculum development in agriculture and technology and is a very passionate advocate of Landcare and sustainable land manage curriculum in schools. He has been a Tidy Towns judge and assessor for over 15 years and a great supporter of Keep Australia Beautiful.



Jesscynda Montalbetti

Project and Systems Officer | Blacktown City Council

Jesscynda is a Project and Systems Officer committed to environmental sustainability and community engagement. She has supported operational improvements and compliance initiatives, contributing to programs that promote responsible waste management.

She is passionate about encouraging behaviour change and equitable access to resources within communities. Her focus on continuous improvement supports initiatives that keep local environments clean and safe for future generations.



Lynda Newnam

Principal | Citizen Science Partnerships

Lynda is passionate about bringing volunteered knowledge, ideas and expertise into planning and regulatory processes to address environmental challenges within a framework that champions honesty, accountability and transparency and encourages collaborative stewardship. She has extensive project management experience, particularly in the environment and higher education, as well as 30 years in volunteering. Her formal qualifications are in primary school teaching and carbon management, with undergraduate degrees specialising in structural linguistics, anthropology and government as well as a Master in Environmental Management.



Paul Pirie

Principal Consultant | Elementri

Paul Pirie is a Wollongong-based environmental scientist, sustainability professional and community leader with experience across ESG advisory, climate reporting, governance, education and stakeholder engagement. He spent more than 15 years working with global investment banks, leading governance, risk and complex program delivery in regulated environments.

Paul also lectures MBA students in sustainable business practice, social entrepreneurship and organisational change, helping translate complex ideas into practical, real-world application. He brings a practical, evidence-based approach to assessing sustainability initiatives, with a strong interest in leadership, community impact, resilience and clear communication.

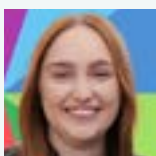


Mike Ritchie

Managing Director | MRA Consulting Group

Mike has over 35 years' experience in the waste management and recycling industry. He has worked with all levels of government and the private sector.

Mike's roles have included Managing Director of MRA Consulting Group, Group General Manager SUEZ Australia, General Manager WSN Environmental Solutions and State Manager of VISY Recycling. He was also a director of a local government and Senior Advisor to the Mayor of Brisbane.



Jessica Speechley

Senior Coordinator Environmental Health | Blacktown City Council

Jessica leads a team of 17 Environmental Health Officers across three teams.

Jessica has been instrumental in implementing and advancing environmental health programs that enhance the well-being of Blacktown's residents.

Her dedication to creating a healthier and more sustainable community is reflected in her successful prosecution record.



Fiona Stock

Manager of Business and Technical Waste Services | Sutherland Shire Council

Fiona Stock has over 20 years' experience in Local Government, delivering innovative and high-performing waste services. As Manager of Business and Technical Waste Services at Sutherland Shire Council, she leads strategic initiatives that optimise operations and future-proof waste collection systems for a growing community.

Fiona is recognised for her expertise in complex contract negotiation and delivery, successfully implementing major waste collection and processing services. She is passionate about driving practical, forward-thinking solutions that achieve strong environmental and community outcomes.

Her work has earned industry recognition, including the prestigious International LiveCom Awards for excellence in local government service delivery.



Matt Taylor

Owner/Director | Heart HR

As a former CEO of Keep Australia Beautiful NSW, Matthew brings over 7 years' experience from his time managing the organisation, including the Tidy Towns program.

Since leaving KAB, Matthew held a number of roles but his passion for the environment has remained.

Currently, Matt runs his own HR consultancy to support small to medium sized businesses - including many not-for-profit organisations.



Dr Trevor Thornton

Senior Lecturer – Hazardous Materials Management | Deakin University

Trevor is currently employed as a Senior Lecturer at Deakin University and also consults widely on processes to develop and implement programs to reduce environmental impacts for a broad range of industry sectors.

Trevor has a wealth of experience, particularly in areas associated with waste management.

Trevor has been working in various aspects of the waste management industry for over 30 years as a regulator and consultant.



Chris Tola

Consultant | Tola Advisory

Chris has had an active involvement with many organisations including Surfrider Foundation, Take 3, the Australian Coastal Society, ARPANSA, National Parks and Wildlife, and the EPA.

Since 2002, Chris has been KAB's Clean Beach Challenge Assessor and State Judge, Tidy Towns Assessor, and was the Program Manager for Clean Beach Challenge and the Tidy Towns Program (2002 – 2005).



Kevin Turner

Manager Environment | Blacktown City Council

Kevin Turner, Manager Environment at Blacktown City Council, leverages 30 years experience in environmental management to drive sustainable initiatives within the community.

Kevin's natural aptitude for identifying emergent risks, trends, and opportunities has been instrumental in moulding Blacktown's dedication to safeguarding environmental health.



2026 Overall Tidy Towns Award Winner



Dungog

Population Category B

Dungog demonstrates what can be achieved when a community combines resilience, local leadership and a willingness to turn concerns into practical action.

The experience of the 2019–20 Black Summer bushfires has clearly influenced the community's approach to resilience, disaster preparedness, environmental responsibility and local problem-solving. What stands out most is the breadth of participation. Community action is not confined to a small number of established groups, with residents across generations and backgrounds actively involved in identifying local issues, developing responses and supporting initiatives.

Projects including Single Use Plastic-Free Dungog, Dungog Boomerang Bags and the PAW Science Hub show how individual leadership can develop into broader community awareness and action. The Paterson Hub & Harvest Centre further strengthens social connections by providing a place for residents to meet, share skills and maintain networks.

Dungog has also maintained a strong commitment to environmental and climate education through initiatives including the Illuminating Women Series, Climate Choice Lecture Series and Celebrating 10 Years of Community Action. Practical environmental stewardship is demonstrated through projects such as Myall Creek Rehabilitation.

With more than 50 identifiable community groups operating across the area, Dungog has built a strong foundation for continued participation. Its combination of community resilience, environmental awareness, volunteer networks, intergenerational participation and sustained local action distinguishes it as the NSW Overall Winner for 2026.



POPULATION CATEGORY WINNER

Population Category A

Coomba Park

Coomba Park is an exceptional example of what a small community can achieve through grassroots participation and local ownership. With much of its work driven by volunteers, residents have built a strong network of social, environmental and community initiatives around the Community Centre and Progress Association. The Sustainability Table, Mystery Market, local art classes, gardening and produce programs and Sustainable Living Group all create opportunities for people to connect, share skills and participate. Environmental stewardship is also closely connected to the community's sense of place, including land care, food growing and protection of the Wallis Lake foreshore. Coomba Park's intergenerational participation and self-reliance are particularly notable given its small population and limited resources.



POPULATION CATEGORY FINALIST

Population Category A

Walcha

Walcha has demonstrated strong community advocacy and cohesion while navigating significant change. As a host community for the New England Renewable Energy Zone, the shire is experiencing the opportunities and challenges associated with major renewable energy and infrastructure proposals. Local residents have taken an active role in ensuring their views are heard through the REZ Community Reference Group, engagement with NSW Parliament and Council's formal Position Statement. Alongside this advocacy, Walcha continues to invest in local resilience, including its \$11 million storage dam and upgraded sewerage infrastructure. WinterFest, the renewed Skate Park Precinct and local community advocates also contribute to a strong sense of identity and connection.



POPULATION CATEGORY FINALIST

Population Category B

Bellingen

Bellingen has a long-established culture of environmental participation, supported by Council policy and a strong network of volunteers. Council's climate emergency declaration, environmental priorities within the Community Vision and Environment Levy provide structure and support for local action. Community participation is evident through practical restoration and citizen science, including Bellinger Landcare and Bellingen Riverwatch, giving residents opportunities to directly contribute to environmental outcomes. The Community Climate Action Plan also provides a link between Council commitments and local action. Initiatives such as the Seniors Festival and community gardens create opportunities for intergenerational participation and sharing of skills. Bellingen's strength lies in the depth of its environmental values and the active community supporting them.



POPULATION CATEGORY FINALIST

Population Category C

Moss Vale

Moss Vale has developed a mature and structured approach to sustainability, combining local planning with practical conservation work and community partnerships. The Urban Rivers – Restore the Wingecarribee River project brings residents together around practical restoration and strengthens connections with the local river system. The Land for Wildlife Koala Tree Give Away extends habitat protection onto private properties, while Priority Weeds Information Days provide residents with practical knowledge to manage weeds and biosecurity issues. The Urban Tree Management Strategy provides a broader framework for maintaining and improving urban tree cover. Together, these initiatives demonstrate a consistent commitment to sustainability supported by Council, community groups and private landholders.



POPULATION CATEGORY WINNER

Population Category C

Leeton

Leeton demonstrates what can be achieved when Council and the community work together around shared priorities. Open communication about financial constraints has helped build a stronger understanding that resource efficiency, waste reduction, environmental sustainability and liveability are shared responsibilities. The community-led refurbishment of the Roxy Theatre, supported by more than 60 volunteers, is a strong example of local commitment, while the Art Deco Festival and contribution of younger residents add to community connection. Leeton's FOGO rollout is a particular strength, achieving a reported 60% landfill diversion rate and 0.3% contamination rate following considerable community education. The combination of Council leadership, community participation and measurable outcomes makes Leeton a strong submission.



POPULATION CATEGORY FINALIST

Population Category C

Parkes

Parkes has demonstrated a strong strategic approach to sustainability, with Council planning for the region's longer-term economic and environmental future. Its involvement as a founding Cities Power Partnership member and designation as a NSW Special Activation Precinct provide a framework for broader initiatives, including solar projects and the proposed eco-industrial park. At a local level, Shaping the Heart of Parkes has provided residents with an opportunity to contribute to the future of the town centre, while projects such as Lake Endeavour Dredging and PAC Park repairs improve existing community and environmental assets. Urban Heat and Canopy Mapping is also helping identify areas vulnerable to increasing heat. Parkes' key strength is the scale and ambition of its longer-term vision.



Biodiversity Conservation



WINNER

Population Category B

Myall Creek Rehabilitation - A Rediscovery

Sustaining the Williams Valley Inc (Dungog)

Sustaining the Williams Valley volunteers rediscovered and began restoring a 25-year-old Landcare riparian rehabilitation project along Myall Creek. After years without maintenance, the site required significant weed removal and rehabilitation. Volunteers have worked alongside external contractors and participated in workshops to restore the creek bank and surrounding environment. The project demonstrates the value of community volunteers returning to long-term environmental projects and renewing local stewardship of important natural assets.



WINNER

Population Category C

Land for Wildlife Koala Tree Give Away

Wingecarribee Shire Council

The Land for Wildlife Koala Tree Give Away is helping address habitat fragmentation across the Southern Highlands by providing locally appropriate native species, including key koala feed trees, to participating landholders. Delivered in partnership with Landcare and the community, the initiative supports vegetation recruitment, biodiversity and wildlife corridors on private land. Participant feedback has also informed improvements to species diversity and plant availability, strengthening the program's ongoing environmental impact.



Biodiversity Conservation



WINNER

Population Category E

Cessnock Koala Habitat Study

Cessnock City Council

The Cessnock Koala Habitat Study has mapped and assessed critical koala habitat to support future conservation and land-use planning. Using drones, koala detection dogs, acoustic songmeters, field assessments and spatial analysis, the study developed an evidence-based understanding of habitat condition and connectivity. The project has increased Council and community knowledge of local koalas and provides a foundation for future surveys and conservation planning involving government agencies, landholders and community groups.



Circular Economy

Award category
sponsored by:



WINNER

Population Category A

Mystery Market

Lynda Love and
Coomba & District Progress Association

The Mystery Market was created by the Coomba District Community Hall Committee as a way to encourage reuse while raising funds for community projects. Held four times a year in partnership with the Community Brunch Café, the market gives residents a place to sell unwanted items, enjoy brunch and connect socially. Strong community support helped make the first event a success. The initiative demonstrates how reuse, social connection and fundraising can be combined through a simple community-led idea.



Climate Change Mitigation & Adaptation

Award category
sponsored by:

snowyhydro



WINNER

Population Category B

Climate Emergency Response Bellingen Shire Council

Bellingen Shire Council has continued its climate action by moving all Council sites and streetlighting to 100% renewable electricity and reaching its 2030 emissions reduction target five years early. A new Corporate Carbon Plan identifies further opportunities for emissions reduction, alongside the transition of petrol fleet vehicles to electric vehicles and completion of Council's first battery project. Together, these actions demonstrate an ongoing commitment to reducing emissions through practical measures and new technologies.



HIGHLY COMMENDED

Population Category C

Byron's EV Transition to Net Zero Byron Shire Council

Byron Shire Council adopted an internationally aligned Net Zero Pathway in 2026, identifying fleet emissions as an important opportunity for reduction. Council engaged staff across the organisation to develop an EV Transition Plan covering fleet review, feasibility, vehicle trials and a business case. Funding through the NSW EV Fleet Kickstart Program enabled the purchase of five electric vehicles, with expected emissions reductions of approximately 14 tonnes of CO₂ annually. Early trials helped build confidence and confirm operational suitability.



Climate Change Mitigation & Adaptation

Award category
sponsored by:

snowyhydro



WINNER

Population Category C

Parkes Urban Heat and Canopy Mapping

Parkes Shire Council

Parkes Shire Council is using urban heat and canopy mapping to better understand and respond to increasing heat across the town. With summer temperatures reaching up to 46 degrees, and extreme temperatures expected to increase, urban greening is an important part of future adaptation. The mapping project provides baseline data on existing tree canopy and heat distribution, helping identify priority areas and informing a future urban greening and cooling strategy to increase shade and reduce heat.



WINNER

Population Category E

Ross Hill: Carbon Neutral Winery

Ross Hill Wines (Orange)

Ross Hill Wines has taken a whole-of-business approach to reducing emissions and improving environmental sustainability. As Australia's first Climate Active certified carbon neutral winery, certified since 2014, the business has implemented renewable energy, water efficiency, waste reduction and regenerative vineyard practices. Collaboration with staff, consultants, suppliers and customers has supported significant emissions reductions, water savings and energy efficiency gains. Ongoing innovation and a focus on further reductions demonstrate a continued commitment to improving the environmental performance of wine production.



Communication & Engagement



WINNER

Population Category A

Coomba Gardening and Produce

**Kim Peace and
Coomba & District Progress Association**

Coomba Gardening and Produce provides a monthly opportunity for residents to share, sell or barter surplus home-grown produce, plants and homemade goods. Established by local community members, the initiative helps reduce food waste while promoting local food production and sustainable living. The market also creates a welcoming space for residents to connect and exchange gardening knowledge. Its success demonstrates how a simple community-led initiative can deliver lasting social and environmental benefits.



WINNER

Population Category B

Life in our Cemeteries

Bega Valley Shire Council and Atlas of Life

Life in our Cemeteries has transformed 14 Council-managed cemeteries into outdoor classrooms for biodiversity, citizen science, cultural heritage and community learning. Delivered by Bega Valley Shire Council and Atlas of Life, the program engaged 518 participants between 2021 and 2026, working alongside more than 30 local experts and conservation organisations. The project has generated valuable biodiversity data while helping residents reconnect with local conservation, demonstrating the value of flexible, repeatable community engagement.



Communication & Engagement



WINNER

Population Category C

FOGO

Leeton Shire Council

Leeton Shire Council's FOGO rollout combined infrastructure changes with extensive community education to reduce landfill waste and support lasting behaviour change. Working with residents, schools, businesses and partner organisations, Council delivered workshops, presentations, media, school programs and targeted outreach. The initiative now diverts around 1,000 tonnes of organic waste from landfill each year and has achieved an exceptionally low contamination rate of 0.3%. The project demonstrates the value of early, consistent and community-focused communication.



HIGHLY COMMENDED

Population Category C

WSC Priority Weeds Information Days

Wingecarribee Shire Council

Wingecarribee Shire Council's Biosecurity team delivered four community events to increase awareness of invasive weeds and provide practical guidance on identification and control. Residents learned about their responsibilities under the Biosecurity Act 2015 and how they could contribute through managing weeds at home and reporting sightings. The program produced an immediate increase in priority weed reports, strengthening Council's control efforts while highlighting the importance of community awareness in addressing widespread invasive species.



Community Spirit & Inclusion



WINNER

Population Category A

Paterson Hub & Harvest

Paterson Hub & Harvest

Supported by Paterson Rotary, Paterson Hub & Harvest was established to address social isolation, underused spaces and declining volunteer participation in the village of Paterson. The community garden and gathering space provides opportunities for workshops, equipment sharing, growing food and connecting with neighbours. Coordinated by the Paterson Community Builders, the project has inspired further community-led initiatives and demonstrates the value of flexible, welcoming spaces in building social connection and creating a lasting community legacy.



HIGHLY COMMENDED

Population Category A

WinterFest: Walcha's Winter Connection

Walcha Business Group

Walcha WinterFest was created to bring people together during the town's quieter winter months while supporting local businesses. Designed by local students and delivered with businesses and volunteers, the event responded to concerns about intergenerational disconnection identified through the Youth Entrepreneur Program. Held in July 2026, WinterFest included the Twilight Winter Festival, Winter in Walcha Markets and Sunday Welcomes trading. Free activities and strong participation across age groups strengthened social connection, civic pride and community identity.



Community Spirit & Inclusion



WINNER

Population Category C

Multicultural Cherry Fiesta

Hilltops Council –
Destination and Economy Team

The Multicultural Cherry Fiesta celebrates the cultural diversity of the Hilltops region and the contribution of multicultural communities to the local cherry industry. Delivered as a fringe event of the National Cherry Festival, it brought together growers, community groups, performers, food vendors, businesses and government partners. The event increased participation, attracted visitors from across NSW and generated \$1.78 million in visitor expenditure. It demonstrates how cultural celebration can strengthen community connection while supporting the local economy.



HIGHLY COMMENDED

Population Category C

Old TAFE Restoration and Repurpose

Ethical SDA (Lithgow)

Ethical SDA restored Lithgow's historic Old TAFE building and repurposed it as Specialist Disability Accommodation, addressing a lack of accessible and inclusive independent housing in the community. The project brought together Lithgow Council, local tradespeople, volunteers, community members and the health and disability sector. The completed restoration provides 17 accessible apartments for vulnerable residents and their families while preserving an important heritage building. The project demonstrates how adaptive reuse can deliver both heritage and community benefits.



Heritage & Culture



WINNER

Population Category B

Bellingen Town Entry Statements Bellingen Shire Council

Bellingen Shire Council replaced outdated town entry statements with new installations celebrating local identity and Gumbaynggirr culture. The project involved extensive engagement with Gumbaynggirr Elders, artists and Aboriginal community organisations, including consultation on dual naming and language. Designed to be durable, climate-sensitive and graffiti resistant, the statements enhance the visitor experience while sharing stories of Traditional Owners. The project demonstrates how thoughtful design and meaningful cultural engagement can strengthen a community's sense of place.



HIGHLY COMMENDED

Population Category C

Roxy Community Theatre Refurbishment Leeton Shire Council

Leeton Shire Council restored the heritage-listed Roxy Community Theatre, preserving an iconic Art Deco landmark while creating a modern, accessible cultural venue. Despite contractor insolvencies, COVID impacts and trade shortages, Council worked with funding partners, local trades, volunteers and the community to deliver Stage 1. The theatre welcomed more than 1,500 people before its official launch and hosted 33 events within months. A 68-member Roxy Dream Team further demonstrates strong community ownership.



Heritage & Culture



WINNER

Population Category C

Rainbow Serpent Water Feature Restoration Gunnedah Shire Council

The Rainbow Serpent Water Feature Restoration Project has renewed an important piece of Gunnedah's cultural heritage, including the Serpent, lower pond and 29 individually designed mosaics created by nine Kamilaroi women. The restoration presented significant challenges, including the loss of two original artists, the age of surviving artists and extensive repairs. Council worked closely with the artists and stonemasons to determine a respectful approach that protected cultural ownership while restoring the feature for future generations.



WINNER

Population Category E

Mulaa Giilang Exhibition Orange City Council – Orange Regional Museum

Mulaa Giilang: Wiradjuri stories of the night sky explored Wiradjuri astronomical knowledge and cultural heritage through photography, artwork, film, music and oral tradition. Developed with Wiradjuri Elders, knowledge holders, artists and creatives, the exhibition connected stories of Country, seasonal patterns and the night sky with contemporary audiences. Education programs, workshops, family activities and AUSLAN interpretation broadened access, creating an engaging experience that celebrated enduring First Nations knowledge and cultural connection.



Litter Prevention

Award category
sponsored by:



WINNER

Population Category D

Adopt a Road: Worth Celebrating Singleton Tidy Towns

Singleton Tidy Towns is marking 20 years of the Adopt a Road program, delivered in partnership with Singleton Council and Bulga Coal. Local community groups undertake quarterly roadside clean-ups across targeted locations, removing litter discarded by commuters. Around eight groups, typically four volunteers each, participate every quarter, collecting approximately 32 bags of litter. Over two decades, the program has removed an estimated 2,560 bags, or 25.6 tonnes, of litter from the local environment.



Liveable Towns



WINNER

Population Category A

The Tidal Pool John Coles, Lynda Neslen and Coomba & District Progress Association

The Coomba Park Tidal Pool project renewed a much-loved community asset while protecting the sensitive Wallis Lake environment. Community volunteers maintained the ageing pool while working with MidCoast Council and the Australian Government to secure funding for its replacement. During construction, a protected seahorse colony was safely relocated by marine specialists. The completed pool provides improved accessibility, facilities and landscaped surrounds, demonstrating the value of strong partnerships and careful environmental planning.



Liveable Towns



WINNER

Population Category B

Connell Park Redevelopment Bellingen Shire Council

The Connell Park Redevelopment has transformed the facility into a contemporary sporting and community hub for Bellingen. Upgrades include modernised sporting fields, improved lighting, enhanced safety and security, and more accessible buildings. The project involved local sporting clubs, Section 355 Committees, pool representatives, Council and the broader community. Ongoing stakeholder engagement was central to the project, helping ensure the redevelopment responds to local needs while supporting greater community participation and regional sporting events.



WINNER

Population Category C

Chelmsford Town Square Upgrade & Activation Leeton Shire Council

The Chelmsford Town Square Upgrade and Activation transformed an underutilised civic space into a welcoming and vibrant community hub. Extensive consultation, heritage restoration, innovative design and strategic activation have created a landmark destination reflecting Leeton's history and identity. The project has increased community use, improved accessibility, supported successful events and introduced digital storytelling. Collaboration with residents, businesses, heritage and Aboriginal representatives and accessibility advocates was central to creating a lasting community asset.



Liveable Towns



WINNER

Population Category D

Broken Hill Accessible Bus Shelter Program

Broken Hill City Council

Broken Hill's Bus Shelter Upgrade Program is improving the accessibility, safety and amenity of public transport infrastructure across the city. Delivered through successive Transport for NSW grants, the program replaces ageing infrastructure with modern shelters, accessible boarding areas and associated improvements at priority locations. Developed in consultation with CDC Broken Hill and the community, the initiative has improved passenger comfort and confidence while establishing a strategic program to support ongoing network improvements and future investment.



WINNER

Population Category E

Experience Orange

Orange City Council

Experience Orange is a free community event celebrating the people, organisations, businesses and lifestyle that make Orange a welcoming regional city. Held in Cook Park, it brings together businesses, sporting clubs, community groups, producers, entertainers and service providers, with a particular focus on helping new residents connect with their community. Delivered in partnership with local organisations and businesses, the event strengthens social connections, encourages participation and builds pride in Orange as an inclusive and vibrant place to live.



Plastic Free Communities



WINNER

Population Category B

Single-Use Plastic Free Dungog Single-Use Plastic Free Dungog

Single Use Plastic-Free Dungog grew from the local Boomerang Bags initiative established in 2016 to reduce single-use plastics going to landfill. Since launching in 2019, the community-led project has brought together volunteers, schools, businesses and Council to reduce plastic waste and influence local waste planning. The initiative now diverts soft plastics and blister packs through ReSmart and builds on Cup Rescue, demonstrating how consistent local action can create lasting changes in waste services.



WINNER

Population Category C

TrailerBlazers: Byron Shire's Move to Reuse Byron Shire Council

Byron Shire Council's TrailerBlazers project tackles single-use food and beverage packaging by making reuse more practical at events. Consultation identified barriers including cost, logistics, washing infrastructure and hygiene. Council responded with a mobile wash trailer and reusable foodware system. Since its inception, the project has serviced 459 events and washed 406,000 reusable items, avoiding the equivalent number of single-use items. The project demonstrates the importance of accessible infrastructure and collaboration in supporting reuse.



Local Heroes



WINNER

Population Category A

Peter Blomfield

Walcha

Peter Blomfield has dedicated much of his life to serving the Walcha community, including 13 years as a Councillor and extensive involvement with local beautification and arts initiatives. His commitment to the community also extends to the Rural Fire Service, with around 60 years of service. Peter has been a strong advocate for environmental sustainability and clean energy, championing these issues in Walcha for more than two decades.



SPECIAL COMMENDATION

Population Category A

Thomas Jeffs

Canowindra

Tom Jeffs moved to Canowindra in 2012 and quickly became an active and valued member of the community. Over the past 14 years, he has played a pivotal role in local events, fundraising and community activities, contributing his time, organisation and energy wherever needed. Tom's commitment reflects the welcoming spirit of Canowindra and his genuine desire to support the people and community around him.



Local Heroes



WINNER

Population Category B

Michelle Dado-Millynn

Dungog

Michelle Dado-Millynn is a producer, designer, educator and passionate environmental advocate who has made a significant contribution to waste reduction in Dungog. In 2016, she launched Boomerang Bags in the community and later co-founded Single-Use Plastic Free Dungog. Michelle has also produced the award-winning documentary The Power of Activism and continues to work with Council and the community to promote practical local action on waste and sustainability.



SPECIAL COMMENDATION

Population Category B

Patricia Maybury

Weston

Patricia Maybury, known as Pat, has been a dedicated champion for Weston for more than 30 years. Together with her late husband Jeff, she established Weston Heritage and Tidy Towns and has remained a constant advocate for the town. As its eyes and ears, Pat works tirelessly to maintain Weston's appearance, encourage community involvement and strengthen civic pride. Her contribution is a lasting example of committed local leadership.



Local Heroes



JOINT WINNER

Population Category C

Roxy Volunteer Dream Team

Roxy Community Theatre (Leeton)

The Roxy Volunteer Dream Team has been central to the success of Leeton's redeveloped Roxy Community Theatre. More than 65 volunteers contribute across front-of-house, hospitality, stage management and technical services, collectively providing more than 8,477 hours of service. The team also receives free accredited training to build job-ready skills. Their contribution goes beyond practical support, helping create connection, pride and a vibrant community hub at the Roxy.



JOINT WINNER

Population Category C

Marie Armstrong

Barrack Heights

Marie Armstrong is the founder of Lake Illawarra Eco Heroes, an environmental education initiative connecting children and families with Lake Illawarra. Drawing on more than 30 years in early childhood education, Marie creates practical opportunities for young people to explore waterways, wildlife, habitats and caring for Country. Her leadership in environmental education and community engagement was recognised through a Marine Estate Champion Award, reflecting her lasting contribution to the community.



Local Heroes



WINNER

Population Category D

Rik Whitehead

Ballina

Rik Whitehead joined the OzFish Richmond River Chapter as a Litter Prevention Champion in January 2026 and has quickly become an active and committed volunteer. He has organised litter surveys and clean-ups, delivered talks about the program and provided valuable local observations on litter issues across Ballina. Rik brings enthusiasm, practical ideas and a willingness to get involved, making a strong contribution to litter prevention and environmental action in the Richmond River community.



WINNER

Population Category E

Chris Gryllis

Orange

Chris Gryllis has been a committed community leader in Orange for more than four decades, including more than 50 years as a member of Rotary and 15 years as Chair of Orange Tidy Towns. His contribution spans environmental stewardship, civic participation, community wellbeing and economic development. Chris has consistently brought people together around practical community action and has played an important role in building the pride, participation and shared responsibility that underpin Orange's Tidy Towns success.



Resource Recovery

Award category
sponsored by:

JR Richards
& Sons



WINNER

Population Category C

Moama Return & Earn Facility Murray River Council

Murray River Council established a local Return & Earn facility in Moama to address low recycling recovery rates and container litter, while also improving recovery of cardboard and polystyrene. Supported by community education and partnerships with schools, community groups and service providers, the initiative has increased container recovery, reduced litter and returned funds to local organisations. The project demonstrates the value of accessible recycling infrastructure combined with targeted local promotion and community participation.



WINNER

Population Category D

Singleton Gives FOGO a Go! Singleton Council

Singleton Council introduced its FOGO kerbside service in July 2025, moving organics to weekly collection and general waste to fortnightly collection. The change required households to adapt their disposal habits, supported by Council communication and engagement. The community responded strongly, with annual data showing a 27.03% reduction in landfill waste and a 41.32% increase in organic diversion. The results demonstrate the impact of well-supported changes to waste services and community behaviour.



Resource Recovery

Award category
sponsored by:

JR Richards
& Sons



WINNER

Population Category E

Smarter Resource Recovery for Orange

Orange City Council

Orange City Council introduced the LBin system at the Ophir Road Resource Recovery Centre in May 2026 to improve material separation and resource recovery. The previous transfer station design relied heavily on mixed waste disposal, limiting recovery opportunities. Purpose-designed LBins and a redesigned traffic layout have improved segregation, reduced contamination and increased operational efficiency. Developed with NSW EPA support and informed by staff and community feedback, the upgrade has also created a safer and more accessible experience for residents.



Waste Avoidance



WINNER

Population Category A

Sustainability Table

Kirsty Duncan and
Coomba & District Progress Association

The Sustainability Table at Coomba Gardening & Produce mornings encourages residents to give pre-loved items a second life rather than sending them to landfill. Held monthly, the two-metre table provides a simple space for residents to leave and collect reusable goods, with remaining items taken home at the end of each morning. With an approximate 98% success rate, the initiative demonstrates how a straightforward community-led idea can reduce waste while strengthening a culture of sharing.



Water Conservation & Protection



WINNER

Population Category C

Urban Rivers Restore the Wingecarribee River

Wingecarribee Shire Council

The Urban Rivers project is restoring degraded and weed-infested areas along the Wingecarribee River. Working with Greening Australia, Landcare, BirdLife Australia and Bushcare volunteers, the project has removed more than 50 invasive willow trees, controlled blackberry, yellow flag iris and other weeds, and planted 2,532 native species. The initiative has improved habitat while strengthening community partnerships. Ongoing work highlights the importance of engagement, promotion and informative signage in supporting long-term restoration.



HIGHLY COMMENDED

Population Category C

Water Network Management - Digital Twin Tech

Leeton Shire Council

Leeton Shire Council developed a Digital Twin of its water network to address water loss and improve network management. Working with Qatium, Taggle Systems and I2R, the project combines smart meters, sensors and SCADA data to create a real-time digital representation of the network. The initiative reduced water loss from 43% to 13%, improved emergency response and strengthened drought resilience. It demonstrates how technology, collaboration and data-driven planning can deliver significant environmental outcomes.



Water Conservation & Protection



WINNER

Population Category E

Healthy Waterways, Healthy Communities

Orange City Council

Orange City Council's Natural Resources Team delivers an integrated program across constructed wetlands, riparian reserves and biodiversity offset lands. Over the past four years, the initiative has planted more than 20,000 native plants, improved access and amenity in key reserves and managed significant wetland assets. Community engagement, volunteer programs and planting events have strengthened waterway health, habitat connectivity and community ownership of local natural assets, while supporting broader catchment and biodiversity outcomes.



Young Legends



WINNER

Population Category A

St Joseph's Primary Earthwise Academy

St Josephs Primary School, Merriwa

Inspired by Pope Francis' 'Laudato Si', students at St Joseph's Primary School identified opportunities to make their school more sustainable and care for the environment. They established a low-maintenance, spray-free vegetable garden using sheep wool mulch, homemade compost and rainwater from new tanks. Their work has improved soil health, increased organic food production and supported classroom air quality. Playground improvements have also created safer habitat for native species, demonstrating how students can lead practical environmental action.



WINNER

Population Category D

Greta-Branxton Primary School Legends

Cessnock City Council

The Greta-Branxton Primary School Legends project is restoring a key habitat corridor within the vulnerable Lower Hunter Spotted Gum Ironbark Forest. The project has involved removing planted pine trees, targeted weed management and planting more than 700 locally propagated native species to support regeneration and biodiversity. Delivered with Cessnock Council, Hunter Landcare, schools and volunteers, the initiative has improved habitat quality and community involvement, with plans to expand participation among schools and volunteers.



Young Legends



WINNER

Population Category E

Orange Nature Playgroup

Orange Nature Playgroup

Orange Nature Playgroup gives young children and families practical opportunities to connect with nature and become environmental stewards. Established by parents, the group provides hands-on experiences including tree planting, bushland regeneration, litter clean-ups, environmental activities and creative reuse projects. Working with Orange City Council and local organisations, children actively contribute to improving green spaces while learning about biodiversity and sustainability. The initiative combines environmental restoration with community connection and helps inspire the next generation to care for their environment.





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