Chairperson's Report — Submissions, Media Releases, Projects, Campaigns and Events Over the Last 12 Months

Over the past 12 months, the Community Environment Network has continued to play an active, informed and highly visible role in protecting the Central Coast environment.

This work has included detailed submissions to Council and the NSW Government, public media releases, practical environmental projects, community education, campaign work, events, webinars, meetings and direct advocacy. The issues have been broad, but they are connected by a single purpose: to ensure that the Central Coast's natural environment, public land, wetlands, waterways, biodiversity, rural landscapes and community character are properly protected for current and future generations.

CEN's work over this period demonstrates the importance of having an independent, community-based environmental organisation that is prepared to examine complex planning and environmental documents, explain them to the community, undertake practical environmental work, and place clear, evidence-based concerns on the public record.

Just as importantly, this work could only be undertaken because of the dedication of CEN's staff, volunteers, members, committees and campaign supporters. The preparation of detailed submissions, the running of public events, the monitoring of planning proposals, the delivery of environmental projects, the coordination of campaigns and the publication of media releases all require time, expertise, persistence and goodwill.

I particularly acknowledge the commitment and dedication of CEN's project staff. Their work is often undertaken quietly and without the public attention that accompanies major campaigns or media releases, yet it is central to CEN's purpose. Whether coordinating volunteers, restoring bushland, supporting landholders, monitoring waterways, running citizen science programs, growing local native plants or delivering environmental education, our project staff demonstrate a commitment to excellence that deserves special recognition. Their dedication reflects not only professional skill, but a genuine care for the Central Coast environment and the community CEN serves.

CEN's achievements over the past year are therefore not the work of one person, but the combined effort of a committed network of people who care deeply about the future of the Central Coast.

Submissions over the last 12 months

A significant part of CEN's advocacy has involved preparing detailed submissions on major planning, environmental and policy matters. These submissions are important

because they provide a formal record of CEN's position, identify technical and strategic concerns, and give decision-makers practical recommendations for improvement.

Submission on the Draft Community Strategic Plan 2025–2035

CEN's submission on the Draft Community Strategic Plan identified concerns that the document did not give sufficient recognition to the Coastal Open Space System (COSS), biodiversity, climate resilience and the environmental foundations of the Central Coast's liveability. The submission called for stronger recognition of COSS, clearer environmental commitments and a community vision that better reflected the importance of protecting the region's natural assets.

Recommendations regarding the Draft Central Coast Strategic Conservation Plan

This submission requested that Central Coast Council sought an extension of the exhibition period for the Draft Central Coast Strategic Conservation Plan and called for greater transparency regarding affected properties, rezoning applications and development applications. The purpose was to ensure that residents and community groups had enough time and information to understand a technically complex plan with potentially significant biodiversity consequences.

Boundary analysis of certified urban capable land and non-certified land

CEN prepared a focused boundary analysis dealing with Certified Urban Capable Land and Non-Certified Land, including concerns at Summerland Point. The submission recommended a 100-metre buffer along the waterfront to ensure future subdivision outcomes were consistent with recent development approvals and better protected biodiversity values.

Submission on the Draft Central Coast Strategic Conservation Plan

CEN's major submission on the Draft Central Coast Strategic Conservation Plan raised serious concerns that the plan was being presented as a conservation plan while enabling large-scale clearing of native vegetation for urban growth. The submission challenged the reliance on biodiversity offsets, questioned whether offsets would be local and permanent, and argued that the plan required substantial amendment before it could credibly be described as protecting biodiversity.

Submission on the proposed inclusion of the Central Coast within a Lower Hunter and Central Coast Regional Plan

CEN's submission argued that the Central Coast should remain a standalone strategic planning region rather than being absorbed into a combined Lower Hunter and Central Coast regional plan. The submission emphasised that the Central Coast has its own identity, environmental systems, settlement pattern, population scale and planning challenges, and therefore requires a dedicated regional planning framework.

Submission on the Deferred Matters Lands Planning Proposal

CEN's Deferred Matters submission examined the proposed incorporation of deferred lands into the Central Coast Local Environmental Plan 2022. The submission raised concerns about "like for like" zoning translations, the treatment of former environmental and scenic protection lands, and whether conservation values were being adequately protected through the new planning framework.

Submission on climate change scenario guidelines - February 2026

CEN supported the broad intent of the climate change and natural hazards reform package but argued that the draft guidelines needed to be stronger, clearer and more outcome focused. The submission emphasised that climate risk assessment must do more than describe risk; it must inform decisions about refusal, redesign, rezoning and stronger planning controls where hazards and long-term climate risk are unacceptable.

Submission on Wamberal Beach terminal protection and sand nourishment - investigation and concept design

Although this was an earlier submission, it remained relevant background to CEN's coastal advocacy. The submission raised concerns about transparency, environmental assessment and the need to ensure that coastal protection works at Wamberal did not shift responsibility, cost or environmental risk inappropriately onto the community or the beach itself.

Submission objecting to the Proposed Amendment to State Environmental Planning Policy (Precincts-Regional) 2021 and Central Coast Quarter Stage 2

CEN objected to the proposed planning controls and associated State Significant Development application for Central Coast Quarter Stage 2 in Gosford. The submission argued that the proposed height and floor space uplift was excessive, inconsistent with the long-established Gosford planning framework, and likely to adversely affect the visual relationship between the city centre, Brisbane Water and the surrounding ridgelines.

Submission to the Draft Central Coast Open Coast Coastal Management Program

CEN's submission on the Draft Open Coast Coastal Management Program focused on Wamberal Beach and its relationship with Terrigal Beach. The submission argued that Wamberal and Terrigal must be treated as a connected coastal system, and that any coastal protection strategy must give proper weight to beach amenity, ecological sustainability, public access, wave reflection, beach scour, nourishment and adaptive management.

Submission to the Delivery Program 2025–2029 and Draft Operational Plan 2026–2027

CEN's submission argued that Council's draft Delivery Program and Operational Plan did not give sufficient practical or strategic effect to the community's stated vision of protecting the environment. The submission raised concern about reduced environmental capital investment, the need to elevate Porters Creek Wetland as a strategic priority, and the importance of stronger commitments to renewable energy, biodiversity restoration, flood resilience and wetland protection.

Submission on the Draft Central Coast Local Strategic Planning Statement 2026

CEN's submission on the Draft LSPS recognised the importance of the document as a 20-year strategic land use planning framework for the Central Coast. The submission supported positive statements about environmental protection, rural lands and climate change, but raised serious concern that the document did not adequately embed Ecologically Sustainable Development, did not properly recognise COSS, and contained mapping issues that needed correction before finalisation.

Submission on the Central Coast Airport Masterplan

Although originally prepared before the current reporting period, the Airport Masterplan submission continued to inform CEN's advocacy concerning Porters Creek Wetland, Warnervale Airport and the need for integrated landscape planning. CEN's position has been that airport

planning must not be separated from the environmental values, hydrology and long-term protection of Porters Creek Wetland.

Media releases and public statements over the last 12 months

CEN's submission work has been supported by media releases and public statements that helped explain complex planning and environmental issues to the wider community. These media releases have translated technical submissions into accessible public messages and encourage residents to become involved.

Unanimous Support for COSS Expansion Means It Is Now Time for Action - August 2025

CEN welcomed Central Coast Council's unanimous support for the expansion of the Coastal Open Space System across the whole local government area. The media release highlighted Porters Creek Wetland as a logical first opportunity for COSS expansion into the former Wyong Shire and called for practical action to follow Council's resolution.

Save the Date to Celebrate Community and Climate Action - October 2025

CEN promoted the Before the Tide Festival as a community-driven event focused on climate action, sustainability, collaboration and local solutions. The media release reflected CEN's broader role in supporting community education, practical climate action and positive engagement rather than simply responding to threats.

Is the Central Coast "Strategic Conservation Plan" Protecting Biodiversity or Selling Out Our Bushland? - October 2025

CEN publicly challenged the Draft Central Coast Strategic Conservation Plan, arguing that the plan risked enabling large-scale clearing of high conservation value bushland. The media release helped alert the community to the scale of potential vegetation loss, the uncertainty surrounding offsets, and the need for residents to make submissions.

Breakfast with the Birds and World Wetlands Day - January/February 2026

CEN promoted its annual Breakfast with the Birds event as a way for families and community members to connect with wetlands, birds, waterbugs, tree planting and cultural knowledge. The event reinforced the importance of wetlands as living classrooms and demonstrated how environmental education can be enjoyable, practical and intergenerational.

Learn How Planning Changes Will Impact Our Community - February 2026

CEN and the Central Coast Community Better Planning Group announced a public meeting to explain major NSW planning reforms. The media release encouraged residents to understand how changes to housing, zoning, development consents, climate resilience and the role of the Housing Delivery Authority could affect the future liveability of the Central Coast.

PFAS, Ourimbah Creek and Community Notification - February 2026

Public media coverage highlighted CEN's concern that residents along Ourimbah Creek should have been directly notified about PFAS detections. The issue reinforced the importance of

transparency, timely communication and precautionary environmental management where contamination may affect waterways, rural residents and downstream communities.

EPA's Own Documents Expose Years of Failure at Mangrove Mountain - March 2026

CEN released a detailed public statement arguing that EPA documents and court findings exposed years of regulatory failure at Mangrove Mountain Landfill. The media release called for State Government responsibility, an independent review or inquiry, transparent monitoring and proper protection of the drinking water catchment.

Delta Electricity Fish Kill Guilty Verdict - April 2026

CEN was quoted in response to Delta Electricity's guilty verdict over a mass fish kill, linking the incident to broader concerns about coal-fired power stations, ash dams, Lake Macquarie and the need for strong environmental regulation. The matter reinforced CEN's long-standing concern that industrial pollution and weak regulation can have serious consequences for aquatic ecosystems.

Council's 21% Environment Budget Chop Unacceptable - May 2026

CEN criticised Central Coast Council's draft Delivery Program and Operational Plan for reducing the projected environmental capital allocation for 2026–27. The media release argued that environmental protection must be treated as core Council business and that Council's budget should match the community's stated commitment to protecting the environment.

Projects

In addition to CEN's campaigns, submissions, media releases and community events, one of the most important parts of CEN's work continues to be its practical environmental projects.

These projects are the quiet, steady and often less publicly visible work of CEN, but they are central to our purpose. They demonstrate that environmental protection is not only about advocacy, policy and public comment. It is also about hands-on restoration, monitoring, education, landholder support, habitat protection, citizen science and practical care for the landscapes, waterways, wetlands and wildlife of the Central Coast.

CEN's project work is also one of the clearest examples of the dedication and professionalism of our staff. The people who run these projects do so with a commitment to excellence that deserves special acknowledgement. Their work requires technical knowledge, patience, field experience, community skills, grant management, reporting, coordination, education and an enormous amount of care. In many cases, they are working behind the scenes to make sure projects are properly planned, safely delivered, scientifically useful and genuinely beneficial to the environment.

That dedication is supported by volunteers, landholders, community members and partner organisations who contribute their time, energy and local knowledge. Together, they make CEN's project work practical, grounded and effective.

Landcare Green Teams

CEN's Landcare Green Teams support groups of local landholders to undertake weed control, revegetation and habitat restoration on private properties. The program provides professional bush regeneration guidance, training, tools and insurance support, while also helping landholders connect with like-minded people in their local community.

This project is particularly valuable because it recognises that biodiversity corridors do not stop at public land boundaries. Private properties can play a vital role in linking habitat, improving landscape connectivity and protecting native flora and fauna.

Bush Regeneration

CEN's professional Bush Regeneration Team continues to provide practical ecological restoration services across a range of environments, including forests, wetlands, coastal dunes, heathlands and endangered ecological communities.

This work requires skill, discipline and ecological understanding. Bush regeneration is not simply "weeding"; it is the careful rehabilitation of living ecosystems. The dedication of the bush regeneration staff reflects CEN's commitment to practical excellence in environmental repair.

Waterwatch

Waterwatch is one of CEN's important citizen science and community education programs. It enables schools, community groups and residents to monitor water quality and contribute to a better understanding of local waterways and catchments.

The strength of Waterwatch is that it empowers ordinary people to become active participants in catchment health. It also helps fill information gaps by adding local community monitoring to broader water quality data.

Land for Wildlife

Land for Wildlife supports landholders who want to manage part of their properties for biodiversity and wildlife habitat. The program is voluntary, non-binding and provides a positive way for private landholders to include nature conservation as part of their land management.

This project is especially important on the Central Coast and the whole of NSW, where many significant habitat areas, wildlife corridors and vegetation communities occur on private land. It allows CEN to work constructively with landholders across the State who want to do the right thing for nature.

Habitat for Wildlife

Habitat for Wildlife extends the idea of private land conservation into urban areas, small properties, gardens and local neighbourhoods. It encourages residents to improve habitat for native birds and wildlife, even where they only have a backyard, courtyard, unit garden or small patch of land.

This project is a reminder that everyone can do something for the environment. Small habitat improvements, when linked across streets and neighbourhoods, can help create stepping stones and wildlife corridors through urban landscapes.

Platypus Watch

Platypus Watch is a community-focused citizen science program that raises awareness of platypus and their habitat on the Central Coast. It helps residents learn about waterways, platypus food sources, habitat needs and practical actions that can support this iconic species.

The project also highlights the importance of healthy creeks and catchments. Protecting platypus means protecting water quality, riparian vegetation, creek banks, aquatic life and the broader ecological health of the catchment.

Wetlands

CEN's wetlands work continues to focus attention on the protection and enhancement of local wetlands. Wetlands are among the most productive ecosystems in the world and provide habitat for birds, fish, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, invertebrates and many plant species.

On the Central Coast, wetlands also play an essential role in water quality, flood mitigation, carbon storage, biodiversity, education and community identity. CEN's ongoing wetlands work is therefore central to its broader environmental mission.

Wildplant Community Nursery and Regional Seedbank

CEN's Wildplant Community Nursery is a practical and highly visible expression of CEN's commitment to local biodiversity. The nursery propagates indigenous native plants for home gardens, restoration projects and revegetation work across the Central Coast.

The Regional Seedbank further strengthens this work by collecting and storing seed from local projects for future use. This is long-term environmental thinking in action. It helps preserve local provenance plant material and supports restoration that is appropriate to the ecology of the region.

The value of CEN's project work

Taken together, CEN's projects show the breadth of the organisation's practical contribution to the Central Coast environment. They support landholders, restore bushland, monitor waterways, protect wetlands, encourage wildlife habitat, grow local native plants, engage volunteers and build community knowledge.

They also show that CEN is not only an advocacy organisation. CEN is a practical environmental organisation. It does the hard work on the ground, often quietly and consistently, year after year.

I particularly acknowledge the staff who manage and deliver these projects. Their dedication is a commitment to excellence. Their work reflects technical competence, care for the community, care for the environment and pride in doing the job properly.

I also acknowledge the volunteers who support these projects. Whether they are propagating plants, collecting seed, monitoring water quality, improving habitat, helping at events, supporting landholders or simply turning up when needed, their contribution is invaluable.

CEN's projects are one of the best ways for people to become involved in environmental protection. They provide practical, positive and welcoming pathways for residents to

move from concern to action. I encourage members and supporters to learn more about these projects, visit the CEN website, attend an event, volunteer where possible, and help continue this important work.

Campaigns, events and community engagement

In addition to submissions, media releases and practical projects, CEN has continued to support a wide range of campaigns, events and community-based environmental initiatives. These activities are central to CEN's purpose because they connect people with practical action, build environmental knowledge and give residents pathways to become involved.

Stop the Strategic Liquidation Plan

CEN's campaign against the Draft Central Coast Strategic Conservation Plan has been one of the major advocacy efforts of the past year. The campaign encouraged residents to make submissions, challenged the plan's reliance on offsetting, and argued that the plan should not be signed off unless serious and irreversible impacts on threatened and endangered flora and fauna are properly avoided and mitigated.

This campaign required extensive analysis, community communication, media advocacy and the preparation of detailed submission material. It demonstrated CEN's ability to respond to a technically complex regional planning process and translate that complexity into clear community action.

Friends of COSS

Friends of COSS continued to advocate for the protection, enjoyment and expansion of the Coastal Open Space System. The campaign is particularly important because COSS remains one of the Central Coast's most significant environmental and community legacies, yet expansion into the former Wyong Shire has been slow despite long-standing promises.

Over the past year, the COSS campaign helped place the issue back on Council's agenda and contributed to the unanimous Council resolution supporting COSS recognition and expansion. The next challenge is to convert this support into land protection, acquisition, biodiversity stewardship and long-term funding.

Friends of Porters Creek Wetland

Friends of Porters Creek Wetland continued to highlight the significance of the Central Coast's largest freshwater wetland. The campaign has focused on permanent protection, reclassification of land from Operational to Community Land, possible Biodiversity Conservation Trust protection, inclusion in COSS, and the need to ensure that airport planning does not undermine wetland values.

Porters Creek Wetland is a practical example of why CEN's work matters. It connects biodiversity, flood mitigation, water quality, carbon storage, climate resilience, planning transparency and community stewardship in a single landscape.

Central Coast Community Better Planning Group

The Better Planning Group continued to meet, monitor planning issues, prepare submissions and encourage community involvement in strategic planning and development matters. Its work has included planning reform, conservation zoning, regional planning boundaries, housing reforms, local character, COSS, biodiversity, rural land protection and the need for better community participation.

The group is a valuable example of CEN's network model: bringing together people with local knowledge, planning experience and environmental concern to improve decision-making across the Central Coast.

Fixing the Central Coast Conservation Land Zones

CEN's conservation zoning campaign has highlighted concerns that some land with conservation value has not received appropriate zoning protection under the Central Coast Local Environmental Plan. The campaign has used webinars, community meetings and planning analysis to explain why zoning history matters and why many landholders have legitimate reasons to seek stronger conservation zoning.

This work is important because zoning is not merely a technical planning matter. It determines what can occur on land, what environmental values are protected, and how conflicts between conservation, rural amenity and incompatible development are managed.

Future Sooner and Save Our Lakes

Future Sooner continued its work on coal-fired power stations, ash dams, lake health, emissions, renewable energy and community health. In 2026, the campaign focus includes Save Our Lakes and opposition to the proposed extension of Chain Valley Colliery.

This campaign connects climate action with local environmental and health impacts. It also demonstrates CEN's ability to support affiliated groups working across the Central Coast, Lake Macquarie and the Hunter on issues that do not stop at local government boundaries.

Before the Tide Festival

CEN supported the promotion of the Before the Tide Festival, a community climate action event at Narara Ecovillage. The festival was designed to bring people together through workshops, talks, panels, music, food and collaborative activities focused on practical responses to climate change.

Events such as this are important because they help people move from concern to participation. They create space for hope, learning and practical action.

Breakfast with the Birds

Breakfast with the Birds continued as one of CEN's important community education events, celebrating World Wetlands Day and bringing families into direct contact with wetlands, birdlife, waterbugs, tree planting and cultural knowledge. The event shows how environmental education can be welcoming, family-friendly and grounded in direct experience of local ecosystems.

The success of events like Breakfast with the Birds depends heavily on staff coordination, volunteer support, partner organisations and the willingness of community members to give their time.

Overall reflection

The past 12 months have again shown why CEN is needed.

The Central Coast is facing intense pressure from population growth, housing reforms, strategic conservation planning, climate change, contaminated sites, coastal hazards, airport planning, public land issues, biodiversity decline and changing State planning rules. These issues are complex, and many are difficult for residents to understand without support.

CEN's role has been to read the documents, identify the risks, explain the issues, prepare submissions, inform the community, deliver practical environmental projects, support local groups and advocate for better environmental outcomes. That work is not always visible, but it is essential.

The submissions prepared over the past year show CEN's capacity to engage with complex planning and environmental documents at a high level. The media releases show CEN's ability to communicate those issues publicly. The projects show CEN's practical commitment to restoration, monitoring, education and biodiversity protection. The campaigns and events show CEN's ability to bring people together, encourage participation and turn environmental concern into community action.

I particularly acknowledge the dedication of CEN's staff and volunteers. The campaigns, projects, submissions, events, newsletters, meetings, media releases and community education activities described in this report could only occur because people are prepared to contribute their expertise, energy and time.

I especially acknowledge the staff who manage CEN's projects. Their commitment and dedication are a commitment to excellence. Their work is practical, detailed and often demanding. It requires environmental knowledge, careful coordination, accountability, community engagement and a genuine love of the natural environment. Their contribution is one of the strongest foundations of CEN's credibility and effectiveness.

Whether that work involves preparing technical submissions, coordinating events, restoring bushland, growing native plants, collecting seed, monitoring water quality, improving wildlife habitat, supporting landholders, managing communications or encouraging others to become involved, it is all part of CEN's contribution to the Central Coast.

I also acknowledge CEN's member groups, campaign partners and community supporters. CEN is strongest when it operates as a network connecting local knowledge, environmental expertise, community concern and practical action.

Looking ahead, the challenge is to ensure that this work leads to real outcomes: expanded and properly protected COSS lands, permanent protection for Porters Creek Wetland, stronger conservation zoning, better coastal management, transparent regulation of contaminated sites, improved water quality, climate-resilient planning, stronger biodiversity protection and Council budgets that genuinely reflect the community's environmental priorities.

CEN's website contains information about its projects, campaigns, events and ways to become involved. I encourage members, supporters and residents to visit the website, read more about the campaigns and projects, attend events, volunteer where possible, and help strengthen the community voice for the Central Coast environment.

The Central Coast's natural environment is not a disposable asset. It is the foundation of our region's identity, liveability, biodiversity, cultural value, community wellbeing and long-term resilience. CEN's work over the past year has continued to defend that principle, and it will remain central to our work in the year ahead.

Yours sincerely,

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