



**Good Practice Story:** The place where the leaves touch the waters, from the mountains to the sea.

**Destination:** Barrington Coast

**Country:** Australia

**Submitting Organization:** MidCoast Council

**Category:** Destination Management

**Destination description:**

**Curiosity.**

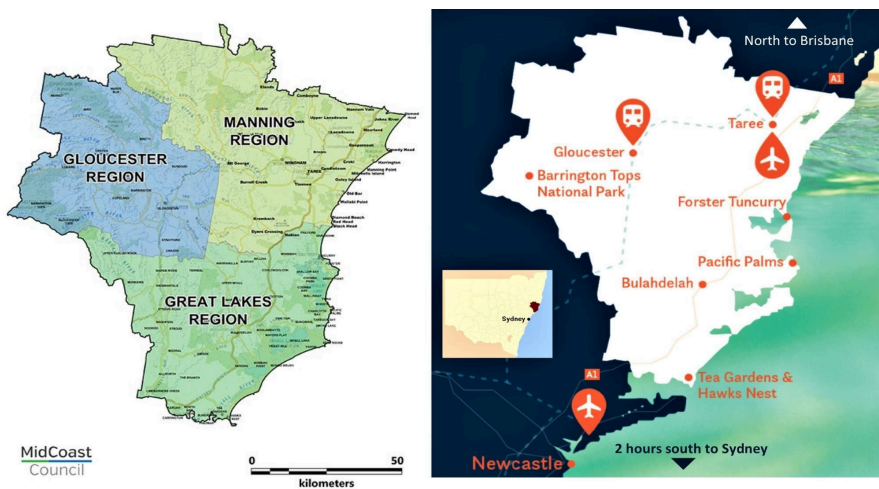
Would you like to hear something new? It’s impossible to talk about who we are without referencing how we got to this point. You’ll find we are on an interesting journey, so walk with us while we explain.

Barrington Coast is the tourism brand for MidCoast Council on the lower mid north coast of New South Wales, Australia. We provide and promote bespoke experiences and products while supporting local businesses, driving sustainable growth and community vibrancy. We are a council merger success story for the NSW Government in the tourism category, bringing together three separately marketed regions, and four previous brand names. And so,

**Destination Barrington Coast is born!**

Our destination name is inspired by an Aboriginal description of our region- “the place where the leaves touch the waters, from the mountains to the sea”. Our new destination name also leverages the best-known attributes of the region, from the World-Heritage Listed Gondwana Rainforests of the Barrington Tops to the RAMSAR protected Myall Lakes wetlands. We are also home to the mighty Manning River, the only double delta river system in the southern hemisphere, and the spectacular Ellenborough Falls – an impressive 200m drop waterfall that is the tallest in NSW and among the tallest in the southern hemisphere.

With over 58 National parks and 192km of coastline, the Barrington Coast offers visitors the ability to connect and bring to life the stories of all the places within a diverse and vibrant region.



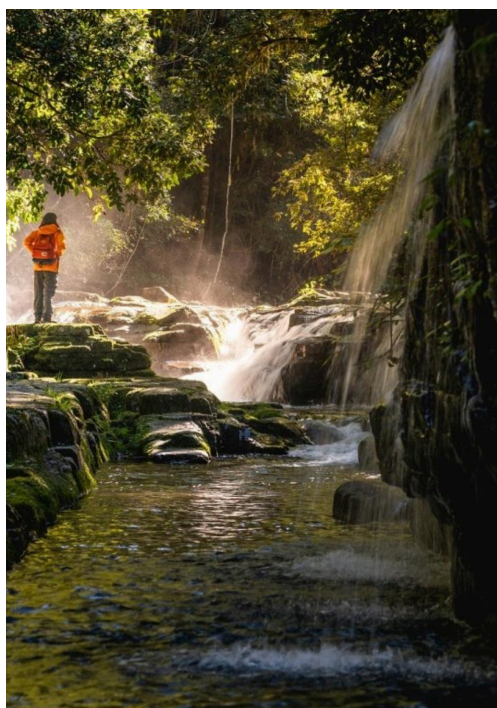


**Summary:**

***With three regions and four brand names coming together we had to reimagine our visitor servicing and destination management strategy.***

MidCoast Council was created as an outcome of a controversial local government merger, meaning there have been many challenges to overcome. Instead of focusing on the challenges, we sought out the opportunities to do better. Our unique positioning prompted a deep dive into understanding the needs of the community, the needs of the traveller, and the needs of the wider tourism industry. Using this opportunity to break away from traditional models of destination management we chose to stay above the curve of the ever-evolving customer, and develop a destination built in the digital era.

Given the size of our region (*over 10,000km<sup>2</sup> – as big as Jamaica!*), and the diversity of our natural environment (*you can build a snowman and a sandcastle within the same day!*), it has taken A LOT of effort to place sustainability as a core pillar throughout the development of a new destination management plan, to ensure we are agile and adaptable to the changing economic environment, while proactively managing our natural assets.





## Good Practice Story

### ***A new direction for a new destination***

Destination Barrington Coast was a result of the controversial 2016 local government merger, and brought together three tourism regions, each with differing priorities and marketing strategies. The state of play at the time of the merger revealed:

- High visitation to our coastal townships, but subject to hyper seasonality, with medium to low yields; less erratic seasonality in our country towns but low yields driven by the dominance of low-cost camping accommodation; low dispersal of visitors across the region due to the parochial nature of the local tourism industry pre-merger.
- Target markets were non-specific and included everyone, meaning that no marketing campaign was effective.
- There were no Destination Management Plans or strategies to grow the industry prior to the merger.
- The Visitor Information Centres were servicing less than 5% of the visitors.

So, it became obvious that a new direction was needed for the newly formed destination.

We wanted to achieve seamless delivery of an exceptional visitor experience, connecting visitors to an authentic destination story that is innovative and inspirational. So, with a new team and a new Destination Management Plan we embarked on the journey of achieving our ambition: *“The Barrington Coast is celebrated as a leading sustainable destination where outstanding natural beauty meets vibrant country living, inspiring healthy and active lifestyles”*.



How are we doing this?

We are working to position ourselves as leaders in sustainability and demonstrate our social responsibility. We did something risky.

The Barrington Coast had the highest number of visitors on the North Coast of NSW. We chose a few key target markets and hero experiences to enhance. We did not want to attract everyone all the time and overwhelm the services provided by our local community. We chose to sustainably grow tourism by increasing the value of the visitor, flattening the seasonality curve and fostering regional dispersal.

Less people. Better visitors.



What else could we do?

Internal initiatives we have adopted to leave a smaller footprint:

- Climate Action Strategy to achieve Net Zero targets by 2040.
- Achieve the Eco-Destination Certification through Green Destinations.
- Support four tourism operators to achieve the Eco-Business certification through Green Destinations.
- Achieve the Strive4Sustainability Scorecard for our Gloucester Visitor Information Centre.
- Support 12 tourism operators to achieve their Strive4Sustainability Scorecard.
- Purchase Hybrid fleet vehicles, wrapped with Barrington Coast advertising.
- Installing over 200kW of solar panels on 10 public buildings, including the Visitor Information Centres.
- Reduce printed visitor information booklets and replace with QR codes linking to online interactive guides.

Summer holidays is our busy season. Our focus is on visitors already in the region and highlighting the experiences in the villages, retail precincts and lesser-known locations to spread the economic and environmental impact of the crowds. We use our highly engaged social media channels to educate visitors in region on how they can contribute to a sustainable holiday and respect the community and environment. Our Destination Management strategy focuses on a Do This approach, as opposed to a Don't do this approach, as it resonates more with our audience. Barrington Coast, as a department of MidCoast Council, work with NSW Forestry Corp and NSW National Parks and Wildlife rangers to discourage unauthorised camping, overcrowding, waste dispersal and misuse of beaches. A key role we play is to provide insights on capacity and booking numbers to help prepare planning for waste collection and increased patrolling areas.

The Barrington Coast is also the top destination for caravanning and camping in North Coast NSW. This means Caravan Parks have been identified as the largest users of water in our region. We installed Smart Metres at the caravan parks and educated the park operators on how to manage their water use and encourage resilient thinking in the way they use water. In the initial 12-month trial we recorded a huge saving of over 200ML of water and this will continue to increase as more smart metres are installed and park operators become more water conscious. One caravan park has recorded an almost 10% reduction in per-occupancy water use with water usage dropping from 169 to 112 litres per day.

Across 2021-22 Barrington Coast's destination management and visitor servicing performance increased at an average rate of 41.9%, compared to the NSW average performance increase of 6%. This placed Barrington Coast 18<sup>th</sup> in Australia on the Tourism Sentiment Index, and 3<sup>rd</sup> in NSW for positive sentiment. Barrington Coast won Gold for "Local Government Award for Tourism" in the 2022 NSW Tourism Awards which recognises excellence in destination management, visitor servicing and sustainability. We also won Gold in the marketing and campaigns category.

As you can see, we have been on quite the journey to achieve our ambition. The local government amalgamation created an opportunity to take advantage of the combined strengths of our three former destinations and led to the creation of our new Destination Management Plan 2030. The Destination Management Plan has delivered significant benefits to our community and re-enforced the importance of protecting our natural assets. It highlighted key enablers that will lift the performance of our region to ensure we are agile and adaptable to the changing economic environment, while proactively managing our natural assets.



#### Supporting evidence

[Barrington Coast](#)

[Destination Management Plan | Have Your Say \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)

[Smart meters save 26 million litres of water - Council \(councilmagazine.com.au\)](#)

[Show Your Love caravan park signs - MidCoast Council \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)

[Visitor sentiment pushes Barrington Coast into top 100 globally - MidCoast Council \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)

[MidCoast Council finalist in multiple awards for tourism - MidCoast Council \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)



