Environmental Sustainability Policy

Section 1 - Introduction

(1) The University of Newcastle (the University) is committed to responsible management of environmental, social, cultural and financial resources so that current needs are met without reducing the capacity of future generations to meet their own.

Section 2 - Purpose

(2) This policy:

a. establishes principles for a University-wide approach to sustainable practices;
b. provides for continual improvement in environmental sustainability and effective management of environmental and climate risks;
c. provides for the management of compliance with applicable legislation;
d. establishes a framework for setting environmental sustainability objectives, targets and action plans;
e. identifies practices, processes and actions that support sustainability and climate reporting obligations; and
f. promotes environmentally sustainable investment practices.

Section 3 - Scope and Audience

(3) The responsibilities established in this Policy apply across the University's activities in Australia, including but not limited to:

a. ethical decision making in accordance with the Ethical Framework;
b. teaching and learning;
c. research;
d. governance;
e. the management of University campus and facilities; and
f. community engagement.

(4) This Policy applies to:

a. the University and its controlled entities operating within Australia;
b. all Colleges, divisions and operations within those entities, including but not limited to Research Centres and Institutes;
c. operational decision making by the University or its controlled entities that may impact the University's sustainability, including but not limited to strategic planning, investment, procurement and infrastructure decisions;
d. University staff, students, contractors, vendors and suppliers; and
e. employees of controlled entities.

(5) This Policy does not apply to the University's offshore controlled entities.

Section 4 - Definitions

(6) In the context of this document the following definitions apply:

a. “Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) refers to the rights that Indigenous people have in relation to all aspects of their heritage, knowledge and cultural expressions. Although, ICIP can be separated into categories, it is often linked. For example, an artwork may be a visual representation of a story that contains information about a certain place and its food sources. It includes:
    i. traditional knowledge (scientific, agricultural, technical and ecological knowledge, ritual knowledge);
    ii. traditional cultural expression (stories, designs and symbols, literature and language);
    iii. performances (ceremonies, dance and song);
    iv. cultural objects (including, but not limited to arts, crafts, ceramics, jewellery, weapons, tools, visual arts, photographs, textiles, contemporary art practices);
    v. human remains and tissues;
    vi. the secret and sacred material and information (including sacred/historically significant sites and burial grounds); and
    vii. documentation of Indigenous peoples’ heritage in all forms of media such as films, photographs, artistic works, books, reports, and records taken by others, sound recordings and digital databases.
b. “sustainability” refers to the responsible management of environmental, social, cultural and financial resources so that the University's current needs are met without reducing the capacity of future generations to meet their own;
c. “Material Sustainability Impacts, Risks and Opportunities” are deemed to be material if:
    i. it can be reasonably expected to affect the University of Newcastle’s prospects - for example, its financial outlook and the ability to achieve its objectives, including providing goods or services to the community;
    ii. omitting, misstating or obscuring that information could be expected to influence the decisions of the primary users of the University of Newcastle’s general purpose financial reports.

Section 5 - Principles

(7) In upholding our commitment to environmental sustainability, the University will ensure the following principles are embedded:

a. Respectful engagement with First Nations peoples and protection of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property:
    i. Proactive, community-led engagement with First Nations peoples that recognises the critical role of Indigenous knowledge systems in shaping sustainability practices grounded in Country, Culture and enduring custodianship.
    ii. Any use or incorporation of First Nations knowledges and practices occurs only with appropriate permissions, that respect and honour First Nations ownership, authority and control, in accordance with the Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Protocol and its accompanying guidance.
b. Leadership and Accountability:
    i. Action on environmental sustainability to effectively manage the University's material sustainability impacts, risks, and opportunities, supported by clear governance, timebound targets, proportionate resourcing, and transparent public reporting.

c. Whole of Institution Approach:
    i. Integration of environmental sustainability across the University's operations, procurement, investment, teaching and learning, research, partnerships and governance.

d. Valuing Institutional Expertise:
    i. The University recognises its academic and professional community as a valuable source of sustainability expertise. Internal knowledge, education, and research capability are prioritised to inform sustainability outcomes.

e. Alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals:
    i. The University aligns its development and implementation of the Environmental Sustainability Plan with the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals 2015 (SDGs), a globally recognised framework that guides action towards environmental protection, social equity, and economic sustainability.

f. Stakeholder Engagement and Participation:
    i. Inclusive and meaningful engagement of stakeholders including First Nations representatives, staff, students, researchers, community organisations, local governments, and regional partners, in alignment with AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard (2015) – to inform the development of sustainability strategic priorities and targets.

g. Evidence-Based Environmental Sustainability Plan and Target Development:
    i. The University applies an evidence based approach to identifying and prioritising environmental sustainability focus areas and targets, drawing on credible data, inclusive stakeholder engagement, and guided by the application of materiality principles as defined by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) 2023. This approach considers both the University's impacts on the environment and society, and the risks and opportunities these issues present to the institution. This approach informs the review of existing strategic priorities and supports the development of relevant, measurable targets and key performance indicators.

h. Transparency and Accountability:
    i. Transparent disclosure of the process and methodology used for the development of environmental sustainability strategy and target development within the University's public reporting. Ongoing reporting of the University's performance against its environmental sustainability commitments and targets on an annual basis to University Council, Executive Leadership Team and to broader stakeholders, through the University's public reporting.

i. Continuous Improvement:
    i. Commitment to continuous monitoring and review of the University's sustainability performance across its activities and operations with the aim of continual improvement against performance baselines and key performance indicators (KPIs).

j. Collaboration and Partnership:
    i. The University recognises that sustainability challenges require collective action and will actively collaborate with government, industry, communities, partners, First Nations peoples and the higher education sector to increase positive impact.

k. Stewardship for Future Generations:
    i. The University recognises First Nations peoples as the enduring custodians of their lands, waters, cultural heritage and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property, and commits to exercising its own stewardship in a manner that respects and supports this custodianship. The University will act responsibly to consider the long-term impacts of its decisions on First Nations peoples, future students, staff, communities, and ecosystems.

Section 6 - Our Sustainability Commitment

(8) The areas in which the University will focus sustainability efforts include, but are not limited to:

Governance

(9) Appropriate and effective governance of the University's sustainability commitments, impacts, risks and opportunities will be achieved through:

a. Council retains overall responsibility for material sustainability impacts, risks and opportunities, and the University's future preparedness;
b. the Finance & Infrastructure Committee monitoring the disclosure of financially material sustainability impacts, risks and opportunities within the University's financial statements;
c. the Risk Committee oversee appropriate risk identification, assessment, monitoring, management and mitigation of material sustainability and climate risks;
d. the Chief Operating Officer (COO) is responsible for implementing this Policy and incorporating material sustainability considerations into enterprise risk management, financial planning, capital allocation and investment decisions. The COO will ensure that relevant and decision useful information on sustainability-related risks, opportunities and performance is reported to the Finance & Infrastructure Committee, Risk Committee and Council, as appropriate to their governance roles and Committee Charters;
e. the Environmental Sustainability Committee supporting the implementation of this Policy, through the drafting of environmental sustainability targets and commitments; supporting appropriate and inclusive stakeholder engagement via interviews, surveys, workshops and roundtables as part of environmental sustainability plan and target development; and reporting transparency, by reporting annual progress against sustainability targets and commitments.

Risk management and planning

(10) The University will:

a. identify and assess potentially material sustainability impacts, risks and opportunities relevant to its activities, stakeholders, and financial position;
b. ensure that risks are assessed and entered into the appropriate Risk Register, in accordance with the Risk Management Framework, and are then subject to review;
c. integrate material sustainability considerations into enterprise risk management and operational management processes, with clear accountability and oversight;
d. incorporate material sustainability considerations into financial planning, capital allocation and investment decisions, proportionate to exposure and maturity;
e. report on material sustainability impacts, risks and opportunities in accordance with applicable legislation, government policy, and regulatory requirements; and
f. align new processes, practices, staffing responsibility, or operational change involving First Nations knowledges with the University of Newcastle's Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Protocol and its accompanying guidance, to ensure that organisational adoption of First Nations-informed practices are framed as subject to cultural authority, appropriate permissions, and Indigenous governance, rather than treated as knowledge freely available for institutional use.

Energy and Carbon

(11) The University will continue to reduce its absolute emissions in line with its commitment to decarbonisation.

(12) The University, including its onshore controlled entities, where applicable, will:

a. report greenhouse gas emissions under the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Scheme;
b. evaluate strategic opportunities for on-site renewable energy installation and battery energy storage;
c. assess the factors that influence staff behaviours and decision-making related to travel, to inform evidence based emissions reduction initiatives and behaviour change strategies; and
d. engage with suppliers and work with them on strategies for emissions reduction and improved emissions reporting.

(13) In implementing the University's Investment Policy the University will evaluate opportunities for portfolio investments aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and use divestment, where possible, as a means of further decarbonising the University's investment portfolio.

(14) In implementing the Procurement Policy the University will assess the sustainability practices of potential suppliers and where appropriate may give preference to those suppliers who can demonstrate alignment with the University's sustainability goals.

(15) In developing the University's built environment, the University will implement design approaches that include sustainability principles and practices. This includes but is not limited to building refurbishment and retrofit, new builds and public realm works.

Water

(16) The University and its onshore controlled entities will:

a. aim to reduce mains water usage in existing facilities, minimise water-intensive land management and vegetation landscaping choices, and implement feasible measures to re-use water;
b. comply with the guidelines and standards for water management, as required by local, state and federal governments, and seek to protect the waterways, wetlands, and coastal areas upon which the University operates;
c. prevent the pollution of water systems and aquatic ecosystems through proactive management of on-campus pollutants and stormwater arrangements; and
d. incorporate measures to minimise water consumption and increase efficiency and reuse in new buildings and site developments, where feasible.

Waste and Recycling

(17) The University and its onshore controlled entities will:

a. establish and implement a circular-economy action plan to increase the diversion of the University's general solid waste from landfill, including recyclable, food and organic and garden vegetation waste;
b. educate employees, staff, students, contractors and community on waste and recycling through a variety of mechanisms and resources;
c. minimise the use of plastic and single use items;
d. establish preferred suppliers, in accordance with the Procurement Policy, who are aligned with the University's sustainability goals; and
e. dispose of hazardous waste in accordance with applicable regulations and statutes.

Biodiversity and Landscaping

(18) The University and its onshore controlled entities will:

a. protect and conserve the biodiversity of the native flora and fauna on campuses;
b. proactively reduce the risk of bushfires through appropriate vegetation management;
c. protect and conserve the wetlands and aquatic ecosystems upon which the University and its controlled entities operate; and
d. ensure that any use or inclusion of First Nations ICIP in biodiversity, bushland, aquatic or riparian zone management, including educational and place-based signage, is undertaken in accordance with the Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Protocol, and developed through respectful, community-led engagement with First Nations peoples and with appropriate permissions, recognising that ICIP is not freely available for institutional use.

Engagement, Education and Research

(19) The University and its onshore controlled entities will:

a. seek to maximise opportunities for students to develop knowledge, build capability in and actively participate in environmental and First Nations sustainability practices as part of their campus experience, through meaningful engagement with First Nations peoples that respects cultural authority and protects Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property in accordance with the Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Protocol;
b. establish and lead partnerships with local, regional and global stakeholders to deliver environmental sustainability research innovation projects;
c. engage with the wider University community to address sustainability challenges through the University's teaching, learning and research activities;
d. support University Colleges, Schools, Research Centres and Institutes to engage with our communities and partners to improve knowledge and practice in sustainability; and
e. increase staff and student awareness of University environmental sustainability initiatives to achieve strong stakeholder awareness, engagement, and behaviour change; and
f. foster collaboration between University academics, Researchers and professional staff in the design and delivery of estate strategy, project delivery, and campus services, utilising a living lab approach to enable applied learning, innovation and real-world sustainability outcomes.

Investments and Procurement

(20) The University and its onshore controlled entities will ensure investment and procurement activities support the delivery of environmental sustainability objectives and broader institutional values by:

a. integrating environmental sustainability considerations, including climate-related risks and opportunities, into investment decision-making processes, consistent with the University's risk appetite, data maturity and statutory obligations;
b. aligning investment practices, where practicable, with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and support the transition to a low-carbon, environmentally responsible economy;
c. actively considering environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors when managing investments, including through engagement, portfolio construction and, where appropriate, divestment strategies;
d. implementing procurement practices that minimise environmental impact across the lifecycle of goods and services, including consideration of energy use, water use, waste generation, emissions and biodiversity impacts;
e. assessing the practices of suppliers and contractors and give preference, where appropriate, to those who demonstrate alignment with the University's sustainability objectives and ethical standards;
f. embedding sustainability criteria into significant procurement, contracting and tendering processes, proportionate to risk, value and market capability; and

g. collaborating with suppliers and industry partners to encourage innovation and continuous improvement across sustainability performance over time.

Status and Details

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Effective Date	23rd June 2026
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Expiry Date	Not Applicable
Responsible Executive	Morven Cameron Chief Operating Officer
Enquiries Contact	Bron York Senior Manager, Sustainability Infrastructure and Facilities Services

Glossary Terms and Definitions

"University" - The University of Newcastle, a body corporate established under sections 4 and 5 of the University of Newcastle Act 1989.

"Risk" - Effect of uncertainty on objectives. Note: An effect is a deviation from the expected, whether it is positive and/or negative.

"Risk management" - The co-ordinated activities of assessing, controlling, monitoring, and reviewing risk in the pursuit of the University's objectives.

"Risk appetite" - Risk appetite is the amount and type of risk that an organisation (or individual) is willing to accept or pursue in order to achieve its objectives.

"Campus" - means any place or premises owned or controlled by the University, but may also specifically refer to a designated operating location such as the Callaghan Campus.

"Controlled entity" - Has the same meaning as in section 16A of the University of Newcastle Act 1989.

"Student" - A person formally enrolled in a course or active in a program offered by the University or affiliated entity.

"Research" - As defined in the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, or any replacing Code or document.

"School" - An organisational unit forming part of a College or Division, responsible for offering a particular course.

"Staff" - Means a person who was at the relevant time employed by the University and includes professional and academic staff of the University, by contract or ongoing, as well as conjoint staff but does not include visitors to the University.

"College" - An organisational unit established within the University by the Council.