CASSOWARY COAST REGIONAL COUNCIL

Coconut Management Guideline

Policy type	Administration
Function	Development & Environmental Services
Policy Owner	Natural Environment
Effective date	12 May 2026

1. Purpose

This Coconut (*Cocos nucifera*) Management Guideline has been developed to define and document the goals and objectives of managing coconuts effectively on council-controlled lands.

The guideline aims to identify the role that coconut palms pay in any specific location through an assessment and classification process based on their location and contribution to a given area.

The Guideline also addresses issues such as potential risk, distribution, impacts and associated costs of coconut management and aims to establish a framework to implement council's coconut management for social, economic and environmental outcomes.

2. Background

Whilst the presence of coconut palms can improve the amenity in the right location, the nuts and fronds can in some circumstances pose a safety risk to the general public.

Coconuts can weigh up to 4.5 kilograms, and a coconut palm can hold up to forty coconuts at one time. Coconut palms usually bear fruit once a year but in tropical areas and under maintenance, two loads can be produced per year. Coconut trees can also grow to heights exceeding 20 metres.

Over the past number of years many local governments have had to face the issue of coconut management. Many have chosen to remove all dangerous specimens while others have settled on a program of targeted removal and de-nutting, while others have adopted the more expensive option of de-nutting only.

For many years Cassowary Coast Regional Council (Council) has been faced with the challenge of how the number of high-risk specimens could be managed. Most often the removal of these useful but inappropriately planted trees has caused a great deal of concern and anguish within the local community.

To reduce its exposure to public liability claims and protect visitors and the public, Council has implemented a de-nutting program.

The current annual cost of this program is approximately $88,000 (estimated 600 plants) to remove fruit. This cost does not include additional expenses associated with clearing fallen trees, fronds and fruit from parks, roads, paths, beaches and stormwater drains. This cost is expected to increase with time.

In addition, coconuts have a significant impact on littoral rainforest, which is listed as critically endangered under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC).

In 2021 the Wet Tropics Littoral Rainforest Recovery Working Group (which included Council) identified coconuts as a high priority weed.

The National Littoral Rainforest Recovery Plan identifies weeds a key threat and weed management as a priority action.

The Coconut Management Guideline will be reviewed every three years to ensure its effectiveness and alignment with Council, community and staff expectations.

3. Scope

This guideline applies to all council staff and contractors undertaking coconut management on council-controlled land.

4. Definitions

Council – means Cassowary Coast Regional Council

Council-controlled land – means land that is owned, leased, licensed, managed, or otherwise under the care, control, or management of Council.

EPBC – means the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*

Fruit – means coconuts from *Cocos nucifera,* including both immature and mature coconuts at any stage of development that may fall or require removal.

Littoral rainforest – means coastal rainforest occurring on or near the shoreline, influenced by marine conditions such as salt spray and wind.

5. Principles

5.1 General

Due to the large number of coconut palms managed by CCRC, it is important as a responsible land manager, that coconut palms are assessed and classified in relation to the following factors:

- Potential to cause harm or damage (based on location)
- Ease of maintenance
- Practical, aesthetic, historical and tourism values
- Benefits provided in the broader open space
- Impacts on bushland reserves and associated impacts on EPBC listed communities e.g. littoral rainforest
- Impacts on coastal erosion negative or positive
- Customer Request records
- Zoning designation within foreshore management plans.

Based on the assessment table below, Council will take appropriate maintenance and management actions, as detailed in the table below.

Class	Location	Value	Risk	Actions
1	High occupancy / use – beaches, esplanades, foreshores and parks Special interest streetscapes	High aesthetic / tourism	Traffic & pedestrian movements are "high"	Retain & Maintain
2	Low occupancy / use – beaches, esplanades, foreshores and parks	Medium/Low aesthetic Low urban forest value	Traffic & pedestrian movements are "low"	Remove or Retain with signage
3	Streetscapes (excludes classes 1 & 2)	Low aesthetic / urban forest value	People: Moderate Property: High	Remove or Retain by agreement
4	Littoral rainforest & coastal vine thickets (excludes classes 1 & 2)	Detrimental	People: Low Environment: High	Remove & rehabilitate

For those palms retained, their condition and density must be assessed in order to ascertain whether they should be retained as is, removed to benefit other palms or replaced as part of a site improvement regime.

5.2 Risk Management

Due to the risk associated with falling nuts and fronds, all palms selected to be retained in high occupancy locations should be maintained on a twice-yearly basis through removal of dead and dying fronds and the removal of inflorescences and developing nuts.

Those palms selected for removal in high occupancy locations must be maintained as described above until such time as removal takes place. If these palms are not maintained, the cost of reactive maintenance increases exponentially the longer the nuts are left on the palm, and the associated risk increase is a liability concern.

If coconut palms are found to have structural defects and/or disease infestation they will be removed.

If coconut palms have grown too tall to make climbing impracticable or unsafe (to perform maintenance functions) then the palm will be removed.

5.3 Establishment

For reasons of risk mitigation, financial responsibility and environmental protection Council will not support an increase in coconut palm numbers.

The planting of any coconut palm on a street verge, within any park, esplanade or foreshore reserves, reserve or land controlled or managed by Council or other parties is not permitted.

5.4 Maintenance

All palms selected for retention should be serviced twice per year as per relevant maintenance criteria. Where this is not possible or feasible due to budgetary constraints, practicability or due to classification as low risk of causing harm (i.e. low traffic/occupancy areas), Council will:

- Remove/selectively thin out the palms; or
- Retain/erect warning signs regarding the potential for falling nuts.

Where palms are assessed to be in low occupancy areas and not marked for removal in the near future, the area underneath the palms should be serviced to prevent the germination of fallen nuts (i.e. regular inspections carried out to remove fallen nuts and termination of any germinated nuts).

5.5 Removal

Where coconut palms are to be removed, relevant public notification and/or consultation will be carried out in accordance with other tree removal procedures and a replacement tree planted using appropriate local native species.

High risk palms removed for safety reasons will not require public consultation, only notification.

Where residents or businesses do not support the removal of coconut palms (excluding high risk palms) Council may consider entering into a coconut maintenance agreement where the property owner agrees to take over maintenance of the palm as per Council standards for coconut palm maintenance (at their own cost).

5.6 Community Education and Interpretation

Council will support community understanding of the need for coconut management through:

- Educational material on coastal vegetation, including identification of transformer weeds
- Information on the ecological role and significance of littoral rainforest
- Interpretive signage in key foreshore locations explaining the importance of maintaining native coastal vegetation and natural processes.

Related forms, policies and procedures	Tree Management Procedure Verge Management Policy Council Local Laws Natural Environment & Sustainability Strategic Framework
Relevant legislation	*Local Government Act 2009* *Planning Act 2016* *Land Act 1994*
Reference and resources	

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