

Proactive Release of Information Policy Engagement Summary

Central Coast Council

Between Monday 1 June and Monday 29 June 2026, the Central Coast Council sought feedback for the draft Proactive Release of Information Policy.

The draft policy aims to increase transparency and make it easier for the community to access information. The draft policy outlines how Council will assess information for proactive release where there is a public interest in disclosure and where release is not prevented by privacy, copyright or other legislation.

The community could share their feedback by:

- Completing the online submission form
- Writing to Council via Email or post

What we heard

Overall, those who completed the online survey, majority were satisfied with the draft policy, with the rest indicating that they were neutral, as presented in Figure 1 below.

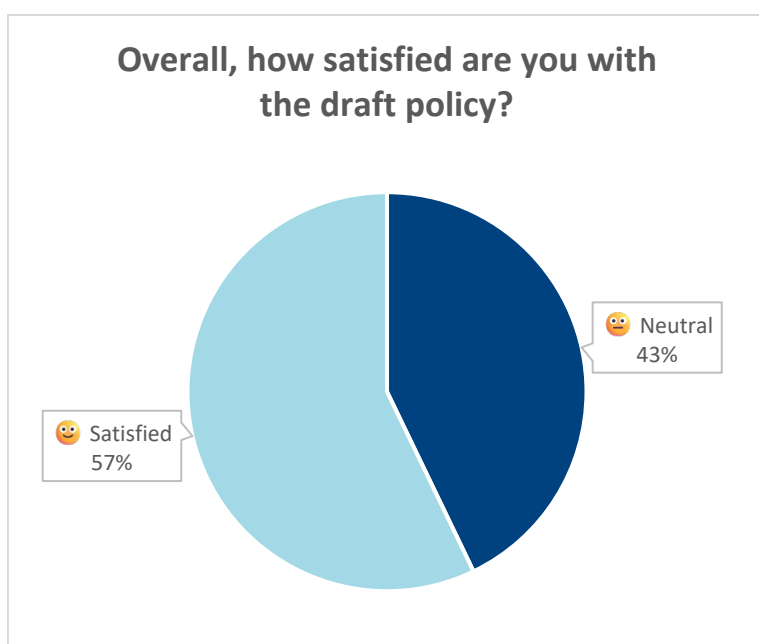


Figure 1: Overall, how satisfied are you with the draft policy?, Online survey on Your Voice Our Coast, 1 June to 29 June 2026, 7 responses.

How you connected



A total of **8** submissions received, **7** online and **1** email



Your Voice Our Coast page had **185** views



Targeted stakeholder email - Delivered to **38** community groups with a registered interest in policy and governance



The strategy/plan/document was downloaded **72** times



Included in Facebook 'What's on exhibition' post, receiving **3,507** impressions on 9 June and **5,581** on 24 June



Included in Instagram 'What's on exhibition' post receiving **1,218** impressions on 9 June and **1,426** on 24 June



Included in 'What's on exhibition' small story in eNews - Delivered to **22,313** people



Included in 'Whats on exhibition' small story in Coast Connect print - Delivered to **62,000** readers

Respondents were asked how easy the draft policy was to understand. Most said it was easy or very easy, while the remaining respondents were neutral, outlined in Figure 2 below. No respondents said the draft policy was difficult or very difficult to understand.

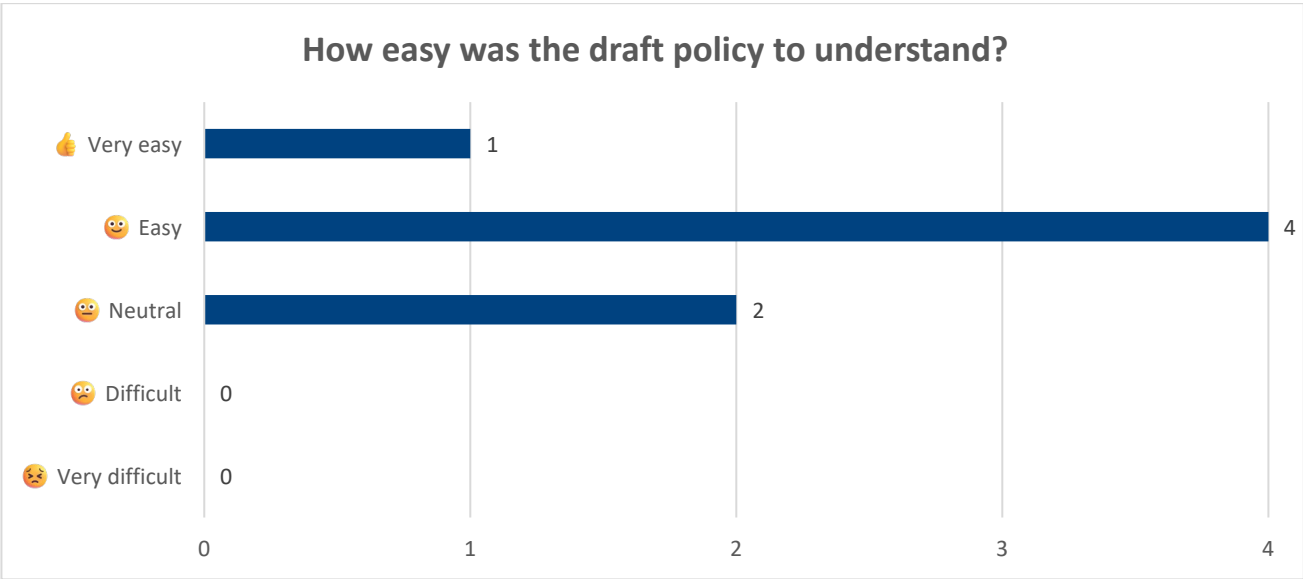


Figure 2: How easy was the draft policy to understand?, Online survey on Your Voice Our Coast, 1 June to 29 June 2026, 7 responses.

Next, online respondents were asked what types of information Council should prioritise for proactive release. Respondents could select more than one option, with the votes outlined in **Figure 3** below. Two respondents selected 'other'. One suggested that information about confidential matters should be released once a decision has been made, including the successful proponent or tender result, contract value and relevant conditions. Another suggested Council should release information about greenhouse gas emissions, reduction targets and strategies to achieve those reductions.

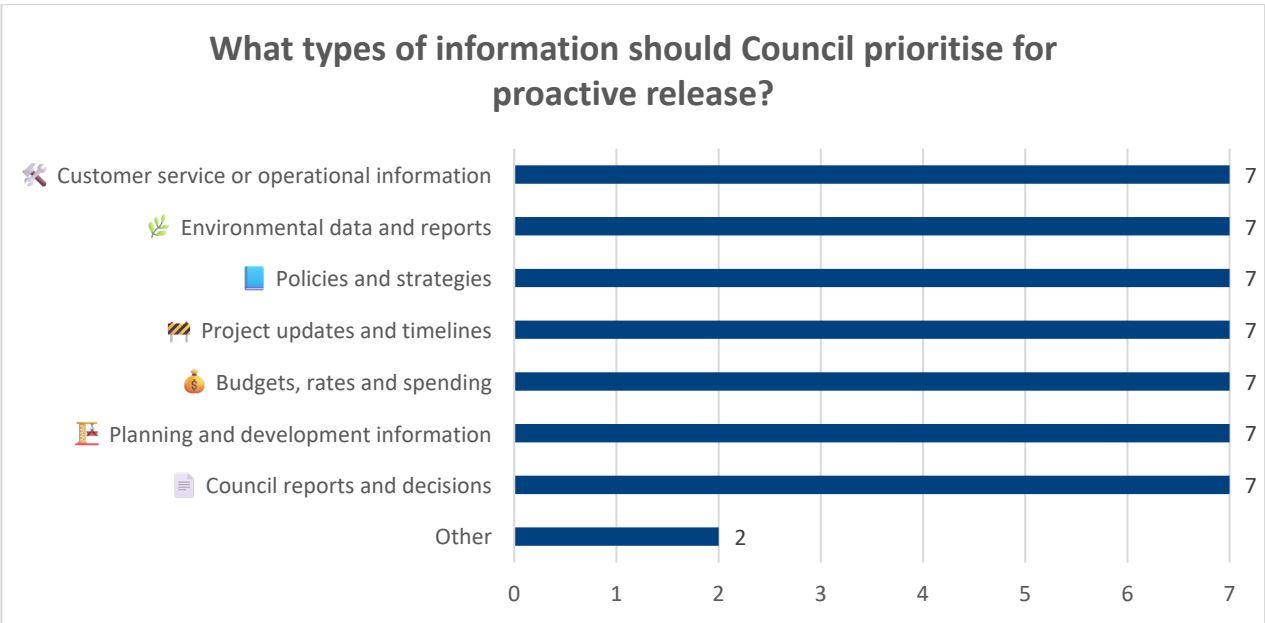


Figure 3: What types of information should Council prioritise for proactive release?, Online survey on Your Voice Our Coast, 1 June to 29 June 2026, 7 responses. *Note: Selection of multiple options allowed

The open text and submission feedback focused on improving clarity, accessibility and accountability in how Council proactively releases information. The key topics raised from the community, in order of number of submitters who mentioned each topic are summarised below.

Define clear categories of information for release

This was the most common theme raised, with respondents asking Council to clearly identify the types of information that should be proactively released. Feedback suggested this could include frequently requested information, technical studies, consultant reports and other high-value documents, rather than leaving decisions to discretion.

"Without categories, proactive release remains discretionary and unpredictable."

Accessibility and equitable access

Respondents wanted information to be easy for everyone to find, understand and use. Suggestions included publishing information in accessible formats, using plain language, providing a searchable online hub and removing financial barriers to access.

"The policy would be strengthened by including commitments to accessibility, plain language and inclusive communication practices. Information should be published in accessible formats, including accessible webpages, tagged PDFs and Auslan interpreted videos."

Transparency in decision-making

Feedback highlighted the importance of publishing the information and evidence Council relies on when making decisions. Respondents also suggested Council should explain why certain information is not released, to help build trust and confidence in decision-making.

"Public confidence is strengthened when the evidence and reasoning relied upon by the Council can be readily understood and scrutinised by the community."

Timeframes and accountability

One respondent suggested the policy should include clear publication timeframes, performance reporting, staff training and alignment with Information and Privacy Commission guidance. This feedback focused on making proactive release measurable and accountable over time.

"Transparency improves only when it is measured and reported. Without reporting, neither councillors nor the community can see whether proactive release is improving."

Priority for high-risk areas

Communities in high-risk or under-planned areas need prioritised access to technical studies on coastal, drainage and environmental matters.

"Without proactive release, communities in high-risk or under-planned areas are structurally disadvantaged."

Council's response

This phase of engagement sought feedback on the draft policy, to identify where clarification, refinement or improvement may be appropriate prior to finalisation. All feedback has been reviewed by Council staff and considered in the development of recommendations to be presented to Council for consideration. The final decision is made by the elected Councillors at a formal Council meeting and may also be influenced by available funding, priorities and delivery programs.

Theme	Council's response
Define clear categories of information for release	Amendment to Policy. This feedback aligns with the purpose of the Policy, which is to guide decision-making about the proactive release of information. Section 4 already recognises that Council may consider whether information has frequently been requested by the public. This section will be updated to also recognise information that supports community understanding of Council decisions or relates to matters of significant community interest.
Accessibility and equitable access	Not supported as a Policy amendment. This feedback relates primarily to how information is made available and accessed, rather than to the decision-making framework for proactive release. Matters such as accessibility standards, plain language, document formats, fee waivers and website functionality which are important however are more appropriately addressed through other mechanisms.
Transparency in decision-making	Not supported as a Policy amendment. This feedback aligns with the Section 3 of the Policy which is to promote open, accountable, fair and effective government. Section 4 also recognises the release of information where it can be facilitated through redactions or withholding information. Suggestions are more appropriately addressed through implementation of the Policy.
Timeframes and accountability	Not supported as a Policy amendment. This feedback relates to operational considerations that are more appropriately addressed through implementation of the Policy.
Priority for high-risk areas	Not supported as a Policy amendment. The purpose of the Policy is to guide decision-making about the proactive release of information. Referencing specific subject matters or geographic areas limits the Policy's broader application and creates an expectation that certain information will be prioritised over other matters of public interest. The existing assessment criteria allows Council to consider the proactive release of all types of information, including technical studies, reports, plans and other information of significant community interest, where appropriate. The intention of the suggestion can be met in other ways.

What's next?

- Report to the Governance and Finance Committee on 11 August 2026 recommending Council adoption
- Proceed to Ordinary Meeting of Council on 25 August for adoption
- Implementation of Policy following adoption at August council meeting.

Find out more and stay up to date at

www.yourvoiceourcoast.com/improving-access-information

August 2026

Appendix A: Submissions

This appendix contains verbatim comments provided during consultation through the online survey and email submissions. It is included to ensure full transparency of community feedback. All comments have been de-identified and or redacted to protect respondent privacy.

Submission type	Satisfaction with the draft policy	Open text feedback
Online	Neutral	More policy coverage on the release of confidential matters that are not subject to public disclosure.
Online	Neutral	The policy would be strengthened by including commitments to accessibility, plain language and inclusive communication practices. Information should be published in accessible formats, including accessible webpages, tagged PDFs and Auslan interpreted videos. Council should also consider providing Easy English versions of key policies, strategies and consultation documents, including this policy. Accessible formats help people access information, while Easy English and plain language help ensure information can be understood. Providing both supports equitable access for a wider range of community members. The policy states that hard copies will be subject to copying charges. This may create a financial barrier for some community members and is not consistent with best-practice principles of equitable access to public information. Council should consider fee waivers.
Online	Satisfied	Nothing to add.
Online	Satisfied	I welcome the development of a Proactive Release of Information Policy and support the principle that information held by Council is a public resource and that proactive disclosure promotes open, accountable and effective local government. However, I am concerned that the draft policy largely establishes a discretionary framework for the release of information without identifying categories of information that the Council will ordinarily publish. While discretion is necessary in some circumstances, the policy would be strengthened by including clearer commitments regarding the proactive publication of information in the public interest. Without clear publication commitments, the policy risks becoming a mechanism by which Council determines what information it wishes to release, rather than a framework that actively promotes public access to information in accordance with the objects of the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009. I respectfully suggest the following matters be considered before the policy is adopted. 1. Publication of Frequently Requested Information

		The draft policy provides that Council may consider whether information is regularly requested by the public. I believe the policy should go further and require Council to identify categories of information that are frequently requested under the GIPA Act and proactively publish those records wherever possible. Where the same information is repeatedly requested, proactive publication would reduce administrative burden, improve efficiency, reduce the need for formal applications and promote transparency. 2. Publication of Information Relied Upon in Decision-Making The policy should include a commitment to proactively publish, where appropriate, information relied upon in significant Council decision-making. This may include investigation reports, technical assessments, engineering reports, environmental studies, compliance determinations, review outcomes and other documents that form the basis of decisions affecting residents and ratepayers. Public confidence is strengthened when the evidence and reasoning relied upon by the Council can be readily understood and scrutinised by the community. 3. Matters of Ongoing Public Interest The policy should specifically recognise that information may warrant proactive publication where it relates to matters that have generated ongoing public concern, repeated enquiries, recurring complaints or multiple GIPA applications. In such circumstances, proactive publication may assist in resolving uncertainty, reducing disputes and improving community confidence in Council's decision-making processes. 4. Transparency of Decisions Not to Publish Information The draft policy identifies several factors that may be considered against publication, including legislative restrictions, consultation requirements and resource implications. Where Council decides not to proactively publish information that is the subject of significant public interest, consideration should be given to recording and publishing the reasons for that decision. This would demonstrate that the public interest test has been properly considered and would improve transparency regarding the operation of the policy itself. 5. Historical Records and Information Relied Upon by Council The policy should also recognise the importance of historical records that continue to be relied upon in current decision-making. Where historical records remain relevant to present-day decisions, consideration should be given to making those records publicly available unless there is a clear and demonstrable reason not to do so. Access to such information assists the public in understanding how decisions have evolved and supports accountability in government administration. 6. Publication Register The policy proposes maintaining a register of information that has been proactively released. Consideration should also be given to publishing details of categories of information considered for release, whether publication was approved or refused, and the reasons for those decisions, where appropriate. Such a register would provide greater transparency regarding the practical operation of the policy.
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		Conclusion I support the adoption of a Proactive Release of Information Policy and commend the Council for undertaking this initiative. However, I believe the policy would be significantly strengthened by moving beyond a largely discretionary model and incorporating clearer commitments regarding the proactive publication of information frequently requested by the public, information relied upon in decision-making, records relating to matters of ongoing public interest, and historical records that continue to influence current decisions. These changes would better reflect the objectives of the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 and further promote openness, accountability, transparency and public confidence in local government decision-making.
Online	Satisfied	No suggestions to improve the draft policy.
Online	Satisfied	N/a
Online	Neutral	N/a
Email	n/a	"Central Coast Council Email: engagement@centralcoast.nsw.gov.au Draft Proactive Release of Information Policy: Submission 1. Introduction [Redacted] welcomes the opportunity to comment on Central Coast Council's Draft Proactive Release of Information Policy. Proactive release is important because it shifts transparency from something the community must request to something Council provides by default. [Redacted] believes proactive release is essential for fair, timely and consistent access to information across the community. [Redacted] supports the intent of the policy and recognises that proactive release is essential to reducing GIPA demand, improving transparency, and enabling meaningful community participation. However, the draft policy remains high-level and discretionary and does not yet provide the clarity or accountability needed and expected of modern local government. [Redacted] recommends strengthening the policy by introducing clear categories of information, defined timeframes, transparent reporting, improved accessibility, and alignment with Information and Privacy Commissioner NSW (IPC) guidance. Our recommended improvements are set out below. 2. Recommended Improvements

2.1 Gap: No categories of information

Why it matters:

A meaningful policy must specify what will be released. Without categories, proactive release remains discretionary and unpredictable. High-value documents — drainage studies, coastal hazard reports, consultant studies — may never be considered. [Redacted] notes that that Council's consultation survey does ask a question about the types of information residents want released, but it is unclear whether this feedback will be incorporated into the final policy, leaving a risk that community input will not translate into actual commitments.

Recommended improvement:

Adopt clear categories for proactive release and ensure future consultation explicitly tests these categories.

[Redacted] recommends the following category set and gives examples to illustrate:

- Governance and decision-making – council and committee agendas and minutes, delegations and authorisations, policies and procedures, organisational structure, statutory registers, codes and governance frameworks, decision-making criteria, governance and reporting.
- Planning and development – strategies, precinct plans, re-zonings, DCP amendments, structure plans.
- Environmental and coastal information – Coastal Management Program (CMP) studies, erosion modelling, estuary data.
- Flooding and drainage information – flood studies, drainage catchment reports, overland flow mapping.
- Transport, access and movement – traffic modelling, pedestrian studies, parking data.
- Capital works and infrastructure – project scopes, budgets, timelines, progress updates.
- Consultant reports – technical studies, modelling, assessments.
- Environmental condition, water quality and resilience – tidal waters and lagoon monitoring, vegetation assessments, heat mapping, canopy data.
- Service access and community infrastructure – community facility planning, open space audits, service access data.
- Monitoring and compliance data – environmental monitoring, audits, enforcement statistics.
- Frequently requested information – topics that repeatedly generate GIPA requests.

	• Statistics and datasets – open data (like water quality results, tree canopy data, traffic counts, flood levels, development statistics, dashboards (like simple visual online pages showing key information at a glance), spatial layers (map based data that can be turned on and off in an online map such as flood zones, drainage catchment, vegetation cover, heat vulnerability, coastal hazard lines, zoning). • Financial transparency – budgets, quarterly reviews, procurement, contracts register. These categories are broad enough to apply across the whole LGA while ensuring that Peninsula relevant information is captured naturally within them. 2.2 Gap: No timeframes or update schedules Why it matters: Information must be published while relevant. Without timeframes, delays become normal and informal release often defaults to a formal GIPA. This undermines transparency and increases workload for both staff and residents. Recommended improvement: • Publish new documents within 10 working days • Respond to informal release requests within 20 working days • Update registers quarterly • Add a “recently released” page. 2.3 Gap: No performance reporting Why it matters: Transparency improves only when it is measured and reported. Without reporting, neither councillors nor the community can see whether proactive release is improving. Recommended improvement: Introduce quarterly proactive release performance reporting on council’s website, and provide annual reporting to the Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee (ARIC), given its role as an independent oversight body. 2.4 Gap: No recognition of high-risk or under-planned areas Why it matters: The Peninsula lacks key planning frameworks (e.g. CMP, inundation plan, and estuary plan)
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and relies heavily on access to technical studies. Without proactive release, communities in high-risk or under-planned areas are structurally disadvantaged.

Recommended improvement:

Prioritise proactive release of information relevant to high-risk areas, including coastal, drainage, vegetation, and heat and transport studies for the Peninsula.

2.5 Gap: No requirements for accessibility or searchability

Why it matters:

Information that is technically “published” but difficult to find does not meet the intent of proactive release. Council’s current website structure makes it challenging for residents to locate documents.

Recommended improvement:

Create a centralised, searchable Open Information Hub. Many NSW councils already operate clear, centralised transparency portals — such as the City of Sydney’s Open Data Portal, Inner West’s “Open Inner West”, and Lake Macquarie’s Open Data & Transparency Hub — showing that searchable, well-organised information hubs are now standard practice.

2.6 Gap: No alignment with IPC guidance or staff training

Why it matters:

IPC guidance is clear that training is important because staff need to know what should be released, how to release it, and why it matters; without training, decisions become inconsistent, delays increase, and information that should be proactively published is instead withheld or pushed into formal GIPA.

Recommended improvement:

Embed IPC guidance, require regular staff training, and mandate annual review of proactive release practices.

2.7 Gap: No guidance on third-party or commercial-in-confidence information

Why it matters:

Most technical studies are produced by external consultants. These reports are often withheld in full because they contain some third-party material or small sections that may be commercially sensitive. This over-broad approach forces unnecessary GIPA applications and prevents access to essential technical information.

Recommended improvement:

Adopt a clear principle that consultant reports are proactively released once adopted, with only narrow, specific redactions for genuinely commercial-in-confidence content (e.g. pricing tables or proprietary methods) or personal information. The remainder of each report should be published proactively, consistent with IPC guidance and standard practice across many NSW councils.

[Redacted] urges that these improvements are adopted. They will strengthen the policy and ensure proactive release becomes a consistent, reliable and community-centred part of Council's work.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our views on the draft.

Yours sincerely

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

22 June 2026

[Redacted]

[Redacted]"