EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The North Coast region boasts a thriving diversified economy supported largely by agriculture and tourism. Ecological and cultural diversity, natural wilderness and pristine coastline are increasingly attracting newcomers in search of a more relaxed lifestyle in a beautiful unspoilt landscape.

Significant future growth is anticipated for the region, with a projected population increase of more than 150 000 people over the next 25 years along with an advance in the median age to approximately 53 years. The region needs to embrace this inevitable growth and lead the process of change to accommodate it.

These guidelines have been prepared to support the Far North Coast and Mid North Coast Regional Strategies developed by the NSW Department of Planning, and to manage this change, maintaining a prosperous economy and protecting the unique North Coast environment through good planning and urban design.

Councils, as part of their responsibilities under the Far North Coast and Mid North Coast Regional Strategies are required to prepare a Local Growth Management Strategy for their local government area.

The North Coast Urban Design Guidelines are designed to assist with this process.

This document has been prepared in two parts.

Part One of these guidelines is designed to assist councils in undertaking an assessment of the existing positive attributes of their own settlements to determine what planning responses may be required to maintain the character of the settlement through future settlement growth opportunities.

Part Two outlines the principles and strategies for managing environmentally, economically and socially sustainable settlement growth. It addresses growth management in three typical planning scenarios and at three scale levels.

Growth and development must be properly planned and designed at all scales - regionally, locally, settlement by settlement, street by street and block by block - in order to properly preserve the existing natural and built character.

A clear understanding of and respect for the region's character is fundamental to its ongoing appeal and success. The guidelines are an additional tool in advancing quality urban design.

PART ONE: UNDERSTANDING EXISTING URBAN DESIGN CHARACTER

01   INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1.0   INTRODUCTION

The NSW North Coast is well known for its relaxed lifestyle, with a mild climate and a string of settlements that are set in a distinctive landscape. This landscape is fundamental to understanding the structure and form of North Coast settlements. The ocean, the dunes, the rugged mountains, gently undulating agricultural land, naturally vegetated hinterland and pockets of dense rainforest are memorable. The sun and afternoon breezes provide comfort. People gather at the shops on the main street or on the beaches and waterways for recreation. The agricultural and forestry lands provide an important regional industry.

The Department of Planning's vision for urban design on the North Coast is to create and encourage sustainable development as well as innovative and imaginative design. The vision recognises that the built environment should address the character of the region. It sees that the design quality of built form and public domain both contribute to the North Coast's sense of place.

These guidelines have been prepared by HASSELL on behalf of the NSW Department of Planning to assist in achieving this vision for the North Coast. The aim of these guidelines is to enhance and maintain the unique natural and urban character of settlements throughout the North Coast Region, while sustaining increasing population and managing development pressure.

The guidelines are based on a broad analysis of the existing urban design character of the various settlement types of the North Coast of NSW to understand what makes this region unique and valuable. The document seeks to provide design strategies and guidance that may inform the layout of future settlements, the expansion of existing settlement, and the design of new built form in order to maintain and improve the positive urban design characteristics of the region.

The classification of settlement used throughout the guidelines is based on existing definitions in the Far North Coast and Mid North Coast Regional Strategies. That is, Regional Centre, Major Town, Town, Coastal Village and Inland Village. These classifications are described in section three.

The examples used throughout the document are based loosely on specific settlements of the North Coast. However, they are not meant to be an accurate reflection of these existing towns, rather they illustrate a methodology for studying and analysing urban design character in existing settlements.

1.1   USING THESE GUIDELINES

These guidelines have been developed to provide a region wide response to the existing urban design character and various settlement types. The guidelines will supplement the Coastal Design Guidelines previously released by the Coastal Council and will provide a broader response to design outcomes across the varying landscapes within the region. They should be used in conjunction with these and other design publications.

The Regional Strategies seek to improve urban design outcomes across the region by requiring the built form of new development to reflect the existing positive design and character, streetscape and landscape setting of settlements. This will be achieved through the development of character statements for localities and consideration of design outcomes through preparation of new planning controls and development assessment.

These guidelines are designed to assist councils in the preparation of their Character Statements and Development Control Plans to achieve positive design outcomes. The guidelines will also assist in the design, consideration and assessment of future development proposals.

Part One of these guidelines may be used to guide councils, planners, developers and local communities in Local Government Areas of the North Coast in undertaking an assessment of the existing positive attributes of their own settlements in order to maintain the character of the settlement throughout future settlement growth.

Part Two outlines the principles and strategies for managing environmentally, economically and socially sustainable settlement growth. It addresses growth management in three typical scenarios: growth through consolidation, growth at the fringe and growth in new release or 'greenfield' locations. The guidelines address urban design issues at the whole of settlement, street and block, and individual building scale.

LEGEND

◎ Regional Centres	▨ National Parks	— Rivers	
● Major Towns	▨ State Forests	— Major roads	
• Towns		— Secondary Roads	
• Inland Villages		┼┼┼┼┼ Rail	
• Coastal Villages		▬ ▬ North Coast Region	

02   INTRODUCTION AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

2.0   THE NORTH COAST REGIONAL CONTEXT

The NSW North Coast, for the purposes of this study, is a region that extends from south of Foster/Tuncurry to the Queensland border and west inland to Dorrigo and the Richmond Ranges. The North Coast Region comprises fourteen Local Government Areas including:

Far North Coast	**Mid North Coast**
Ballina Shire Council	Bellingen Shire Council
Byron Shire Council	Clarence Valley Council
Kyogle Council	Coffs Harbour City Council
Lismore City Council	Great Lakes Council
Richmond Valley Council	Greater Taree Council
Tweed Shire Council	Kempsey Shire Council
	Nambucca Shire Council
	Port Macquarie – Hastings Shire Council

The NSW North Coast has many different landscapes ranging from long beaches, rolling countryside and hills and valleys of the hinterland to more rugged forested areas and rainforests. The region is defined by its distinctive climate, a blend of sub tropical to warm temperate. It contains many national parks including world heritage areas, nature reserves and state conservation areas and has one of the richest biodiversities in Australia. The coastline, waterways, rural and naturally vegetated areas of the region are of immense environmental, social and economic value.

The numerous villages, towns, major towns and regional centres share this regional character and context, although the landscape settings of the settlements vary considerably within the region. The distinctive character and edges of each settlement are often separated and defined by natural areas such as waterways, ridgelines or rainforest.

The diversity of environments and landscapes in the North Coast can be characterised in two distinct groups - beaches, headlands and coastal plains, and rural hinterland.

Beaches, Headlands and Coastal Plains

The coastal fringe is characterised by beaches, dunal systems, headlands, and coastal plains with heathlands, wetlands, estuaries, lakes, mangroves and tidal flats.

These areas have historically been developed for commercial fishing and occasionally whaling. They often served as ports for shipping, as well as supporting timber getting, dairy, sugar cane and banana production.

Tourism has more recently emerged as a major local industry.

Rural Hinterland

The rural hinterland is characterised by rolling hills, mountains, wide valleys and tall open forests. There are rainforests in more sheltered areas in the hinterland. The hinterland includes the backdrop of Mount Warning and the mountain ranges of the caldera rim to the north.

The rural hinterland supports forestry, cropping, dairy, pasture and horticulture, and here settlements have often developed to support these industries.

03   NORTH COAST SETTLEMENT TYPOLOGIES

3.0   SETTLEMENT TYPOLOGY

The distinctive regional context of the North Coast also sets the scene for a range of settlement types, sizes and formats, offering a range of housing choice, affordability and services, and promotes settlement patterns that protect and enhance environmental values and natural resources. A discussion of the broad characteristics of each settlement type follows.

The settlement typology used in this study is:

— Coastal Villages

— Inland Villages

— Towns

— Major Towns

— Regional Centres

3.1   COASTAL VILLAGES

Coastal villages typically have a strong sense of community, are generally of walkable size, with possibly a public school, community hall, local shops and parks. Often the coastal location and moderate climate makes the settlement attractive to holiday makers and 'sea changers' seeking a more relaxed lifestyle. This can lead to significant development pressure and population growth. Care needs to be taken to ensure settlement growth is sustainable and of a desirable character.

3.2   INLAND VILLAGES

Inland villages similarly have a strong sense of community and are compact and well-defined with an obvious centre and community focus - a general store or hotel. Faced with similar pressures to coastal villages, as a result of their recent popularity as lifestyle areas, inland villages must consider their future carefully to ensure long-term social and environmental sustainability. The settlement pattern and character of new development can contribute significantly to this sustainability.

3.3   TOWNS

Towns exhibit many of the characteristics of villages but with an increase in scale, population and the range of services on offer. They will have a clearly identifiable commercial/retail/community centre, can support a wider range of housing types and generally the streetscapes will be more structured and formalised. A town's character is often imparted by its street pattern and relationship to the immediate landscape setting whether it be coastal, riparian, agricultural or naturally vegetated. Towns typically provide a greater range of services to the community including hospitals, schools, and possibly police station and the like.

3.4   MAJOR TOWNS

Major towns are typically those settlements which have benefitted from long term incremental growth linked to a strong, often diverse, industrial or agricultural base. They necessarily provide a higher order of services - schools, a hospital, main street and industry - offering stable employment and sufficient cultural facilities (art galleries, sports grounds, theatres) to sustain its immediate and surrounding populations. Status as a major town implies an increased range of housing types and some pockets of increased density - flats, shop-top housing and the like. They are typically able to sustain high quality parks and open spaces, are strategically sited with good access to transport infrastructure, have mature street plantings and a clear, identifiable character related to their landscape setting. Major towns are a civic and cultural focus for a network of surrounding smaller settlement types.

3.5   REGIONAL CENTRES

Regional centres typically benefit from a particularly favourable strategic siting on a coastal or river port and major transport infrastructure. They perform an essential role as a regional hub for numerous disconnected urban areas and exhibit the highest order of civic, cultural, recreational, retail and residential uses including, for example, tertiary educational facilities, regional shopping centres and government agency offices. Regional centres face the challenges of significant growth and increasing population. Sound planning and urban design strategies are essential to meeting these challenges. Regional centres are able to sustain a high quality public domain including streets and parks.