

### **3.10. The Coal Loader Report**

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**ATTACHMENTS:** Nil

**PURPOSE:**

To outline the achievements and highlights of The Coal Loader Centre for Sustainability throughout 2021 and into the beginning of 2022.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

Whilst the pandemic and La Niña events forced a major change to the way our usual programs were delivered in 2021/22, The Coal Loader continued to engage the public on a regular basis with a diverse offering of both in-person and online events.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

Nil.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**1. THAT** the report on activities at the Coal Loader Centre for Sustainability be noted.

## LINK TO COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN

The relationship with the Community Strategic Plan is as follows:

### 1. Our Living Environment

#### 1.1 Protected and enhanced natural environment and biodiversity

### 4. Our Social Vitality

#### 4.2 North Sydney is creative and home to popular events

## BACKGROUND

The Coal Loader Centre for Sustainability offers a strong and diverse array of programs and events including a major events portfolio, free workshops and courses, public guided tour programs, a digital tour and augmented reality app, educational excursions and programs, and facilitated third-party event management. Its physical presence is also combined with and ever-growing digital presence through a comprehensive communications program.

As a premier lower shore venue, the centre and grounds also provide an excellent opportunity for self-timed community social activities and an avenue for the delivery of other key Council programs including the Streets Alive Community Garden program, the Bushcare Volunteer Nursery and the Green Events series. In addition, the site acts a venue for events put on by other sections of Council, including the Community Development, Arts and Culture team.

## CONSULTATION REQUIREMENTS

Community engagement is not required.

## SUSTAINABILITY STATEMENT

The following table provides a summary of the key sustainability implications:

QBL Pillar	Implications
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Increasing community awareness of sustainability</li><li>Best-practice delivery of environmentally sustainable events</li></ul>
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Increasing community connectedness to the Coal Loader and between local community members</li></ul>
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Coal Loader programs are delivered in accordance with the budget and help support local business wherever possible</li></ul>
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Coal Loader programs are implemented in accordance with the Delivery Plan</li></ul>

## DETAIL

Every year, The Coal Loader runs multiple programs to showcase and highlight the features of the site and promote every-day sustainability to the North Sydney community and wider public. The ever-increasing number of visitors also come to learn about the site's history and sustainability initiatives as well as to enjoy the beautiful views and parklands.

With the continued impact of the pandemic, The Coal Loader saw a modified program to enable the delivery of safe and effective engagements. Live community events took place when safe to do so (with robust Covid-safe measures in place) and activities in the digital space took over where appropriate.

2021 saw programs briefly return between lockdowns to larger audience levels with community groups restarting their tours, some large-scale physical events returning, third party venue hire increasing, and some school programs restarting. However, shut-downs, global logistics issues and general uncertainty in the events market made it essential that all physical engagements were adaptable. It is hoped that 2022 sees a renewed appetite for in-person public events while also maintaining interest in the strong digital projects the site offers such as Australia's largest augmented reality app.

Below is a snapshot each program and what we have achieved over the last 18 months.

### Coal Loader Events Program

The Coal Loader Events Program is designed to provide a mix of large-scale community focused events, smaller activations, ongoing engagement series, and sustainability-focused workshops. The aims are; to increase quality visitation to the site, continue to define a sense of place with community-building activities, providing educational opportunities to the residents of North Sydney, whilst always demonstrating best-practice sustainability in events. Scheduled in-person events through much of 2021 had to be postponed and activations were diverted to either our digital platforms or delivered, where possible, as small outdoor gatherings with restricted numbers.

Online events during periods of lockdowns and restrictions included; two virtual Artisans Markets held via the North Sydney Council website in 2021, which enabled us to provide an avenue for our stallholders to continue selling their wares to the public. The ongoing promotion of The Coal Loader Kids Trail and the launch in February 2021 of the much-anticipated The Coal Loader App, Australia's largest augmented reality app. The app takes visitors around the site with a choice of 3 trails History, Sustainability and Native Animals. Each trail has twelve stops and a mix of historical re-enactments, native animals and sustainability concepts are all brought to life with the help of augmented reality. To date there has been just under 10,000 uses of the various trails on The Coal Loader app and over 7,000 uses of the digital kids trail. In 2021 there were also two kids sustainable crafting classes, two seasonal cooking classes, digital Plastic Free July and sustainable Christmas campaigns and the inaugural Coal Loader Photography Competition, a chance for the local community to share the images taken during what was generally a time for self-times activity on site and showcasing the space in a different light.

2021 also saw a return to large scale physical events that commenced with the Summer Artisans Market, a COVID safe event with 50 stalls and approximately 2000 people in attendance throughout the day.

Salon de Refuse, a people-powered art re-homing exhibition and activation, took place over three weeks in the workshop. An estimated 500+ works were re-housed during this period, saving them from landfill and the event was well attended and widely shared on social media. Loader Lights, a multi-sensory, carbon-neutral lighting show was held for the second time in Tunnel One across 9 days over 3 weeks in December 2021 with approximately 5,000 visitors plus the addition of a pop-up bar and live music on the lower lawn. This unique event attracted national news coverage.

The Coal Loader Christmas Artisans Market was held in December 2021 with 100 stalls, live music, and approximately 5,000 visitors in a covid-safe outdoor setting.

Many small-scale outdoor, Covid-safe events were also able to continue in 2021 including the popular group exercise series, Wednesday Wellness which continues twice a week into May 2022, the 'This Thursday Theme' workshop series, and a variety of talks on history and sustainability themes. In addition, in 2021 The Coal Loader Sketchbook challenge began, including on-site classes, organized meet-ups, and associated online creative group run in collaboration with local artist Josephine Josephsen and Coal Loader artist in residence, Philipa Hagon. This challenge will culminate in a public exhibition of these community works later in the year.

The Sunset Sessions platform pop-up bar ran three times in early 2021 before being halted by the NSW lockdowns and later temporarily replaced with the Loader Lights pop-up bar in late 2021.

Lost Bird Found, a mental health initiative across North Sydney Council, saw over 100 rock birds being created and hidden for the community to find around the site and posted on social media. QR codes on the backs of the birds directed people to online mental health resources. The remainder of the 2022 Coal Loader events schedule is looking bright as we hopefully move into a time with more relaxed conditions and hopefully more favourable weather conditions.

Coal Loader Education Program

The Coal Loader education program focusses on delivering site specific sustainability content to schools, universities/TAFEs, and other professional bodies. Educational institutions are also encouraged to use the 'living lab' we have created at the Coal Loader for their own learning purposes. The education program was largely postponed in 2020/21 but 2022 has seen a rapid restart of educational institutions visiting or making future bookings. Historically student groups from environmental science and management, sustainability and the built environment, and architecture courses, and various primary and secondary school years have utilised the site. Tertiary institutions who visited included UTS, UNSW, Macquarie University, and various Northern Sydney TAFES. The significance of the site and the way it connects both Indigenous and industrial history and concepts of sustainability and adaptive reuse remain major draw-cards for the space.

In addition, bookings of tours professional bodies and other government departments have also re-started. Interest primarily focuses on the adaptive reuse of an ex industrial facility and the incorporation of sustainable design and technology into a heritage site.

2022 has also seen the Mess Hall used for *First Nation Women nurturing First Nation Women* regular meet ups, hosted by Aboriginal elder, Auntie Jeanie. Waverton Hub also continue their weekly arts education program in the same space. Both are supported by Council.

#### Coal Loader Guided Tour Program

The Coal Loader guided tour program, operating since 2011 has seen an increase in demand due to the growing awareness and popularity of the site. This enabled the creation of The Coal Loader volunteer guide program, where our local guides take tours of the site for the public. Like most volunteer programs, the guided tours were put on hold for most of 2020/21, with just 6 tours taking place over 2021. However, February 2022 saw the re-start of the program with 2 public general tours per month (on the first and third Saturdays) and the re-starting of the privately booked tours from social groups during the week.

Aboriginal cultural tours, held three times in 2011, were put on hold during the heights of the pandemic, are also set to return in 2022, with the seasonal program plus special tour + workshop events for NAIDOC week.

Free public tours were also conducted for Australian Heritage Festival, NSW Seniors Festival, and the Sydney Edible Garden Trail.

#### Coal Loader Venue Hire Program

The Coal Loader has multiple hireable spaces including The Platform, Tunnel One, The Genia McCaffery Centre for Sustainability, Mess Hall, and various transitional spaces, offering a unique environment that appeals to a diverse range of users. Venue hire opportunities include public exhibitions, sporting events, conferences, musical performances, awards nights, presentations, filming, product launches, fashion events, community classes and training.

Liaising closely with a broad spectrum of event organisers provides an exciting opportunity to promote a broader understanding of best practice in events sustainability. Events approved on site must adhere to the environmental and cultural ethos of the site, pledging to be single-use plastics free and utilize the solar power on site and exclude the use of fossil fuel generators.

Where possible, events are accepted on the following criteria:

<b>Essential</b> All criteria in this column should be implemented	<b>Desirable</b> Inclusion of these elements will be treated favourably	<b>Welcome</b> Inclusion of these elements will be treated favourably
<b>In-Line with our Aims:</b> The event will be in keeping with our aim to establish the Coal Loader Platform as a premier venue for events	<b>Sustainable Education:</b> An element of public sustainable education is highly desirable as part of the event	<b>Diversity Groups:</b> Events aimed at connecting and supporting diversity groups are encouraged on this accessible and all-ages friendly site
<b>Sustainable Event Practices:</b> Accepted response to the sustainable practices events questionnaire is mandatory	<b>Free event to the public:</b> (safety closures for bump-in/bump-out, private launch ceremonies, Tunnel One, & VIP seating/areas excepted)	<b>Not for Profit:</b> Special considerations apply for NFP and community groups, especially those focussed on sustainability
<b>Accessible:</b> All events on the site must ensure that they are fully accessible to all abilities	<b>Unique, Unusual, First of its Kind:</b> As a unique location, we encourage unusual and ground-breaking events.	<b>Educational:</b> As a historic and learning site we encourage a range of educational events and can assist with tour bookings

Due to the events management duties being based on site, The Coal Loader venue hire program was one of the first to be able to re-open across council, adhering to stringent Covid-safe conditions. A series of 360 photos of the site enabled virtual site-tours to continue despite lockdown conditions, enabling future event planning to continue safely.

Private hire opportunities to deliver public events is encouraged on site and in the past 18 months Council was able to collaborate with third parties to host events such as The Sydney Claymakers Exhibition (over 3 days and 3,500+ visitors), The Australian Finska Championships (500 visitors), Music in the Sky (over 4 nights and 500 performance-goers), Designers on Show (over 2 days each with approx.1,500 visitors).

### Coal Loader Communications Program

The Coal Loader social media channels remain a key avenue for connection to our audience and promotion of our events. Allowing Council to deliver relevant, timely and interesting information to our followers, our social channels help in the delivery of our programs and promotion of the site and practical advice on sustainability. The Coal Loader has continued to grow its digital presence and has 7,400 followers on Facebook, over 2,700 on Instagram, and 2,500 subscribers to the Coal Loaders quarterly e-newsletter. The combined Coal Loader digital audience has now grown to be the second largest across Council.

### Other projects

The period 2021/22 also enabled us to deliver several projects on the site in collaboration with, and in support of other teams within Council such as the *Project 2060: Homeward Bound* exhibition, delivered by the Arts and Culture Team, featuring 46 artists and six art groups. This exhibition will share varied stories of artists' remarkable resilience as cultural gatekeepers during a year of incredible change.

In collaboration with Councils Sustainability team and a group of dedicated volunteers, part of the workshop was brought to life as the Sydney Library of Things, with objects including

tools, gardening equipment, children’s arty gear, toys and games, art and craft supplies and recreational equipment among other things.

The volunteer run, not for profit library opened briefly in May 2021 before being affected by the NSW shutdown, and then re-launching in time for The Coal Loader Christmas Artisans Market 2021.



The Coal Loader Artisans Market, December 2021



Loader Lights, December 2021





This Thursday's Theme sustainable crafting classes, various 2021

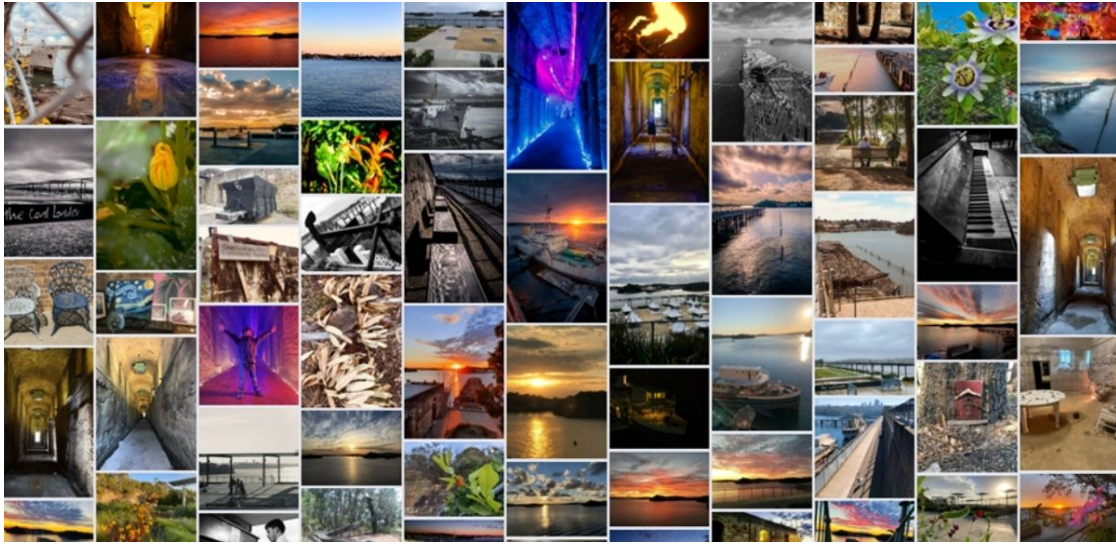


The Coal Loader Augmented Reality App



Working with 3<sup>rd</sup> party events to deliver single-use-plastic free events





The Coal Loader Photography Competition 2021. Various community artists



Wednesday Wellness weekly classes, 2021 and 2022



Guided tours, pictured: Dr Ian Hoskins during the Australian Heritage Festival 2021





Pop-up bar with live music on the Lower Lawn, December 2021



Salon de Refuse, 2021



Lost Bird Found Mental Health Project, 2021. Rock drops shown from various artists.





Sydney Claymakers Expo 2021



Music in the Sky concert series in Tunnel One, February and March 2022



Aboriginal heritage guided tours, pictured: Karen Smith from the AHO in 2021



Popular self-timed activities during Covid: painting, the pop-up piano, the new outdoor office