

## Combined Shoalhaven CCBs

Ward Meeting Handout – Future Engagement Framework (March 2026)

### 1. Our Position

We support reform that removes legal ambiguity, strengthens the independence of community forums, protects volunteers, Council staff and Councillors, and clarifies Council's role.

The question is not whether change is required — the question is which model delivers legal clarity while preserving meaningful and independent place-based engagement.

### 2. Assessment of the Options

Option 1 – Community Access Forum

- ✓ Provides a presentation pathway to Council
- ✓ Does not provide recognised advisory standing for local community forums
- ✓ Centralises engagement at the point of presentation rather than through ongoing place-based dialogue

Resolves legal separation, but does not provide structured advisory continuity between communities and Council.

Option 2 – Ward-Based Committees

- ✓ Formal Council committees meeting twice per year
- ✓ Agenda set with CEO involvement
- ✓ Reduced independence and increased compliance obligations

Provides clarity, but changes the character of local engagement.

Option 3 – Formal Council Committees for All CCBs

- ✓ Full governance integration into Council structure
- ✓ Significant compliance and oversight requirements
- ✓ Council paper notes this option is highly expensive and problematic

Provides maximum control but removes autonomy.

Option 4 – Accredited Community Forum (ACF)

- ✓ Advisory role only (no decision-making authority)
- ✓ Requires appropriate legal structure (such as incorporation or formal auspice)
- ✓ Mandatory governance and conduct standards
- ✓ Conditional recognition with suspension/withdrawal powers
- ✓ Requires modest administrative support to maintain compliance and transparency

- ✓ Provides a structured advisory relationship between Council and independent community forums

What do we mean by accreditation?

Accreditation means conditional Council recognition of an independent community forum operating in an advisory capacity only. It requires appropriate legal structure (whether through incorporation or formal auspice), adherence to defined governance and behavioural standards, and allows Council to suspend or withdraw recognition if those standards are not met.

A periodic review between Council leadership and accredited forums could also ensure issues are addressed early and the engagement framework continues to operate effectively.

ACFs would require a small annual grant to support their consultative role, including insurance, governance compliance and public communication.

Addresses Council's principles:

- ✓ Legal separation
- ✓ Protection for volunteers, Council staff and Councillors
- ✓ Community independence
- ✓ Strong community voice
- ✓ Transparency and fairness
- ✓ Place-based engagement

### **3. Why Recognition Matters**

Incorporation creates a legal entity.

Accreditation provides recognised consultative standing between community forums and Council.

Option 4 therefore provides both legal clarity and structured advisory continuity.

### **4. Consultation Process**

While we did not consider Ward-based meetings to be the optimal consultation model, we are participating constructively in the process to ensure community views are clearly expressed.

Following completion of the Ward meetings, we respectfully seek a collective meeting involving all 23 current CCBs to review outcomes and consider the preferred way forward.

### **5. Key Message**

We support structural clarity.

The Accredited Community Forum model achieves legal separation while preserving independent, place-based advisory engagement.