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## **MAROOCHY 2025 COMMUNITY VISIONING**

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Maroochy Shire is a sea change community on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland Australia, and is dealing with rapid population increase, major infrastructure and social issues and significant demographic changes. *Maroochy 2025 Community Visioning was a* community driven strategy to develop shared visions and actions for the Maroochy Shire community as a means of creating a sustainable and empowering future for the Maroochy Shire community. The intent of Maroochy 2025 strategy was to create a community owned and principle based response as a means of addressing the increasing threats to a preferred way of life. The strategy was jointly managed by the local Council and a community representative taskforce. The Maroochy 2025 strategy is known and has been used quite extensively across Australia as an informative case study in applied futures studies, public participation and community advocacy.

*Maroochy 2025* clearly separates itself from other public participation activities in that it created a level of community capacity and community leadership through anticipatory democracy approaches and the use of action learning activities. The Maroochy 2025 strategy was facilitated by the authors over a 2 year period and through this time, key lessons were recorded.

This paper will outline context, methods and key outcomes of the community visioning strategy. Outcomes will focus on the foresight capacities generated within stakeholders; governance implications of undertaking such initiatives; and missed opportunities in applied futures.

(Parts of this paper are adapted extracts from the M2025 Community Visioning Book)

### **KEY ARGUMENTS**

The Oregon model of community visioning is an effective process of vision-orientated planning, at the strategy or systems level of reality, however it lacks holism, as an effective cultural change or transformational process. This weakness is only apparent when viewed using futures frameworks, such as *casual layered analysis* and the *futures landscape*.

Maroochy 2025, sought to address this potential weakness by integrating futures studies methods and tools with the above strategic model.

M2025 improved the foresight capacity of participants and changed their thinking and image of the future.

## **A STRATEGY CALLED MAROOCHY 2025**

Maroochy 2025 Community Visioning refers to the process in which the community of Maroochy Shire has developed its own visions and action plans for their shared future. Each part of the visioning process employed participatory community engagement and action learning methods.

The impact of population growth is one of several issues affecting Maroochy Shire's future. Other issues include the changing nature and viability of traditional industries; increasing community requests for more direct involvement in decision making, concerns surrounding sustainable development and the provision of solid governance and leadership. These various factors made it clear that business as usual could not continue. These issues have all contributed as drivers, in developing a strategy for managing the future. The key question became "The future is changing! Do the citizens of Maroochy want to be passive receivers of the future or active co-creators?"<sup>1</sup> The strategy that ensued was titled the '*Maroochy 2025 Community Visioning Project.*'

### **Mapping Maroochy Shire's Future**

The pre-consultation priming sessions resulted in the development of *Maroochy 2025* project deliverables. These project objectives were:

- Engage the Community in the decision making process;
- Work collaboratively to determine probable future scenario;
- Work collaboratively to determine preferred future scenario;
- Agree a future scenario and vision for 2025;
- Develop Action plan & process to facilitate the delivery of the agreed future scenario;
- Transparent process via communication & community involvement;
- Cross agency boundaries to receive comprehensive input; and
- Assess the impact of community engagement with its participants.

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<sup>1</sup> Pre-consultation workshop with 150 community members agreed a community vision was needed, 17th April 2003.

The project outcomes were:

For the Community

- Tap abundant energy and talent
- Create civic sense of purpose
- Expose community tensions
- Debate alternative futures
- Build Hope
- Build capacity for Questioning

For Maroochy Shire Council

- Get ahead of the change
- Develop Visions and actions for:
  - Future Planning Schemes
  - Future Corporate Plan
- Build new partnerships
- Policy Integration opportunities

Firstly, in order for the *Maroochy 2025* Project Team to best meet the project deliverables, they researched local and international planning frameworks. This research resulted in the decision to use the *Oregon model of community visioning*<sup>2</sup> that had a proven track record of success in several cities of the United States and Australia (e.g. *Hillsboro 2020*, *Flagstaff 2020*, *Wollongong Futures*). Basing *Maroochy 2025* on the *Oregon model of community visioning* meant the project was provided with a foundational framework that had the flexibility to explore alternative methodologies in which to evolve visioning processes.

Secondly, Maroochy Shire Council enhanced the Oregon Model using futures-orientated planning concepts from the established discipline (social science) of Futures Studies, to best meet the project deliverables. Maroochy Shire Council directly applied future studies concepts and practices adapted from the works of Professor Sohail Inayatullah.

These concepts included:

- Emerging Issues Analysis
- Futures Triangle
- Causal Layered Analysis
- Scenario planning
- Creative visualisation
- Back casting
- Anticipatory action learning

The application of these tools and concepts was made possible through the engagement of facilitators who were undertaking futures studies at the University of the Sunshine Coast.

Thirdly, it Anticipatory Action Learning (AAL) was used as a pivotal methodology. This methodology valued and engaged the inherent capacity of the community to create alternatives by defining issues, exploring images or visions, and formulating solutions/actions for Maroochy Shire.

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<sup>2</sup> Maroochy 2025 was based upon a 4-step model used by Steven Ames in Hillsboro Oregon USA; this plan was called Hillsboro 2020. Steve Ames is a world-renowned community planner, and has an outstanding track record in community visioning in both the United States and Australia

## Scope and size of the Maroochy 2025 project

The scope of *Maroochy 2025* reached a targeted audience of up to 4% of the population in order to be representative and statistically significant<sup>3</sup>. Therefore community engagement was the cornerstone of *Maroochy 2025*. The *Maroochy 2025* process sought not just to engage community opinion, but to *involve* the community in activities through which they would best articulate their preferred visions for the future of their region. *Maroochy 2025* processes were specifically designed to collect and utilize as many varied contributions as possible. To maximize public participation, many different methods of collecting and informing public opinion were applied

These methods included:

- A Pre-consultation workshop
- The ‘Maroochy 2025 Background Paper’
- A website
- Stakeholder consultation and questionnaires
- Community workshops
- School summits
- Youth Council (‘Youth Voice’) visioning sessions
- Maroochy Shire Council staff workshops
- Community summits and summit pre-polling
- Creation of a Community Task Force
- Action planning groups
- An Action Planning ‘Integration Night’
- Document and literature reviews
- Four community surveys
- Maroochy 2025 Community Newsletters
- Articles in Maroochy Council newsletters, local newspapers and other media

This ensured an unprecedented level of involvement from residents, making *Maroochy 2025* a thoroughly representative community plan. In the end, it embodied:

- Input from more than 3,840 people who directly participated in the visioning and action planning stages;
- More than 40,208 public responses (written, emailed, phoned, etc.);
- More than 32,514 hours of community participation time;
- More than 3,368 community vision ideas/goals (from which the community vision statement was created); and
- More than 70 community strategies and 200 community actions - crafted from the above ideas/goals, during some 1,728 hours of prioritising, organising and summarising by community members.

Participants included representatives from a range of special interest bodies and stakeholders, including:

- State and Local Government

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<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics Basic *Community Profile: LGAs*. (Catalogue No. 2001.0), Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2002.

- Local academics and professionals
- Business representatives
- Community groups
- Schools and youth groups
- Local ethnic groups
- Indigenous communities
- Persons with disabilities
- The general public

This broad mix of representatives was especially active in the development of the action planning stage of *Maroochy 2025*.

### **Application of Anticipatory Action Learning**

The application of Anticipatory Action Learning (AAL) methods within the *Maroochy 2025* Project was applied in two ways. Initially the AAL methodology was utilised with a thirty-two-member community taskforce. The purpose of the taskforce was to reflect the community's voices and write the 2025 vision. The taskforce engaged in the following AAL methodology processes:

- Reflective questioning,
- Sharing and expressing the Community Taskforce's existing knowledge of the Shire,
- Finding the innovative and intuitive answers to Maroochy's future issues and problems,
- Defining, creating, and analysing possible trends, issues, and scenarios for Maroochy Shire.

These processes enabled the facilitators to explore the community taskforce's ways and means of knowing; question their assumptions at different levels; and create alternative perspectives. The community taskforce was able to scan the future more broadly than any previous visioning methods utilised throughout the shire. As a result the Community Taskforce were able to establish six key focus areas as parameters for the visioning process and develop a sound '*possible scenario*' paper as a precursor to the main community consultation activities.

The second way Anticipatory Action Learning was applied was within the design of the community workshop. These workshops, utilising AAL practices, consisted of engaging the community in learning how to solve the real world problems currently facing Maroochy Shire. This was achieved by firstly informing the community of the future issues and problems as identified by the community taskforce and secondly by stimulation of all the intelligences including emotional, spiritual, intellectual and cognitive, to develop fresh perspectives on existing knowledge. Learning occurred among the community groups as they could individually recognise that it was they who shared the problems, and therefore they could contribute to the solutions and provide mutual support, advice, and criticism on the proposed solutions in reaching Maroochy's visions.

During November 2004, an extensive qualitative survey was undertaken to evaluate the public participation phases and methods of *Maroochy 2025*. The results showed that over 60%<sup>4</sup> of the stakeholders who participated throughout the project rated the community visioning workshops (that incorporated Anticipatory Action Learning) as the most effective method used, followed by the Community Visioning Summit.

## **LESSONS LEARNED FROM MAROOCHY 2025**

In summary there are five key areas of learning that are reflective of the *Maroochy 2025* experience and Anticipatory Action Learning. These findings are contextualised as: (1) what worked well; (2) what didn't; (3) learning outcomes; (4) unexpected outcomes; and (5) tensions.

### **What worked well?**

Integrating the Oregon Model of community visioning and action planning with Futures Studies concepts ensured a holistic process and product for transformational cultural change. Using Casual layered Analysis (CLA) (Inayatullah, 2002) as a deconstruction tool, the Oregon model is effective at the systems and litany level of reality. However, it does not question deeper levels of reality such as worldviews, cultural myths and stories that give meaning (Figure 1). CLA is a method able to question vertically the causes of a problem, but also horizontally alternative futures. Similarly, using the Futures Landscape concept, the Oregon model mostly operates at the Strategy level to create better futures, recognising the value of a vision, whilst rarely exploring alternative scenarios and their respective visions (Figure 2).

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<sup>4</sup> Maroochy 2025 Evaluation Survey No 4 December 2004.

# CLA as a frame of reference

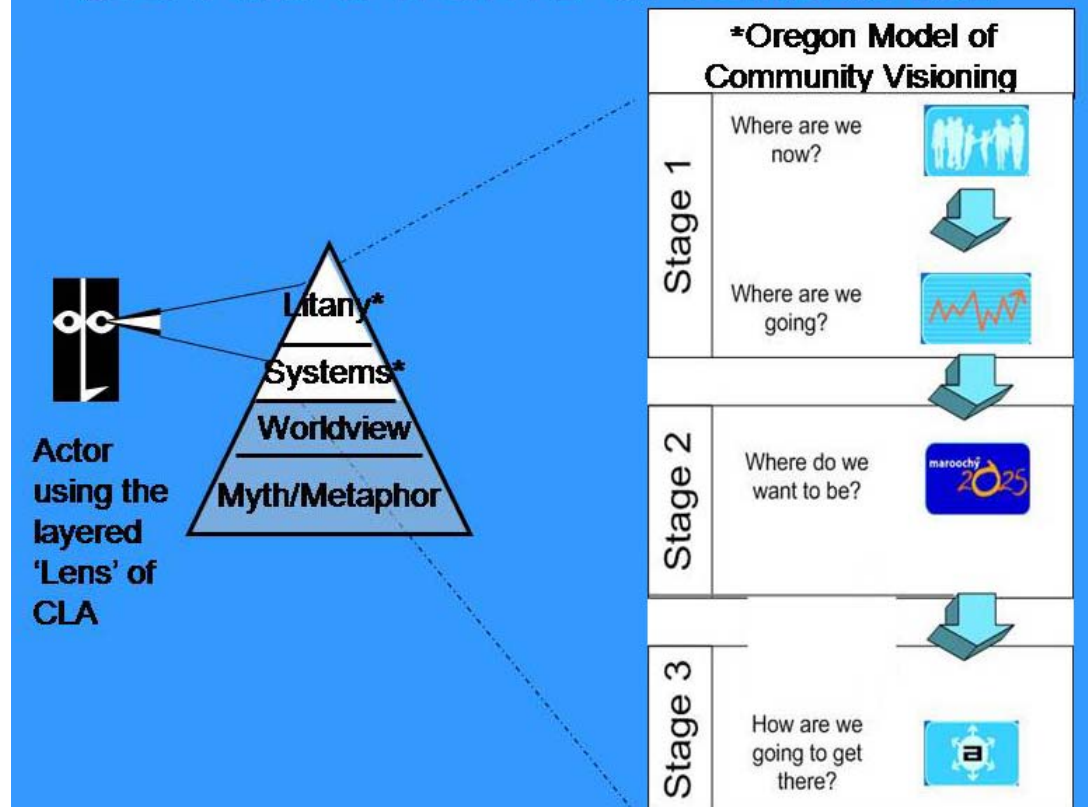


Figure 1: CLA as the frame of reference for the Oregon Model

# Futures Landscape as frame of reference

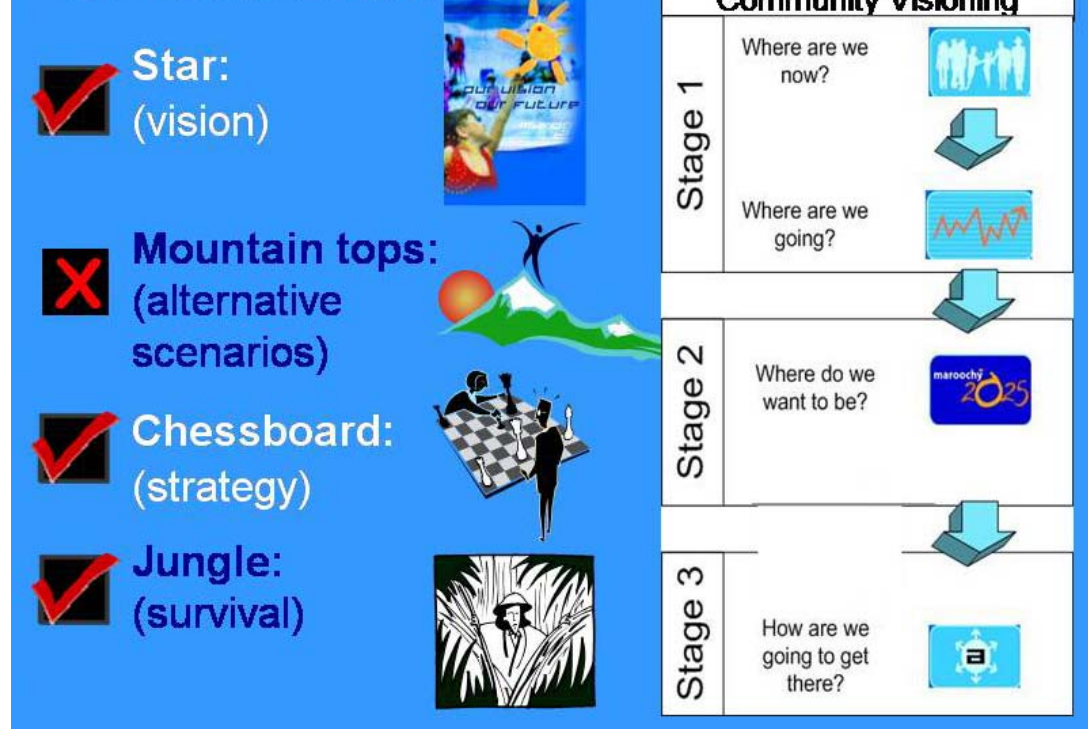


Figure 2: The Futures Landscape as the frame of reference for the Oregon Model

The community was open to the notion of having their assumptions being challenged, and this was achieved exceptionally well through the use of Anticipatory Action Learning methods. Their ability to reframe their understanding of what they think and feel about the issues driving their future, provided a more insightful assessment of past, current and emerging issues and the solutions required resolving such issues. *Maroochy 2025* enabled Maroochy Shire Council an advanced ability to engage much of the community with creative and alternative methods relating to the creation of a 20 year community plan.

Inclusive and participatory long term planning methods that use futures studies methods (especially Anticipatory Action Learning) can become a transformative approach to community planning, as this challenges the reproducibility of the present into the future. Another key aspect of *Maroochy 2025* that worked exceptionally well was the use of the Community Taskforce and Community Action Planning Teams. This practice enabled and enhanced community capacities to be actively engaged and build competencies in the community planning process, whilst meeting their need to be involved with planning decisions that will affect the future of Maroochy Shire. Finally, the community advocacy that grew out of the involvement of citizens in the Taskforce and Action Planning teams, motivated the political lobbying in 2005 that ensured that Maroochy 2025: Stage 4 (Implementation and Monitoring) was included as a project in the next Maroochy Shire Council 2005 -2009 Corporate Plan. Unfortunately, since that time, the Council has not progressed implementation of Stage 4.

### **What didn't work so well?**

What was not done effectively was the task of consistently involving key local government representatives and future candidates throughout the whole process from beginning to action planning. This mistake originated from a belief that the initial commitment from local politicians, key opinion holders and stakeholders at the beginning would suffice and be enough to sustain the level of political support for the entirety of the project. (For example, there was an unexpected amount of change in numbers of new Councillors for Maroochy Shire Council during the middle of the *Maroochy 2025* project and the new Councillors did not necessarily agree with the purpose and outcomes being derived from the project – particularly the promotion of community governance.) As a result of the community-visioning summit, the then Mayor committed to include the outcomes of the Maroochy vision into the Council's 2005-2009 Corporate Plan.

Thus the politics communicating a consistent message regarding the purpose and outcomes required from *Maroochy 2025* to key opinion holders is paramount. The aspect of securing future funding by stakeholders to implement actions to make the visions a reality still remains a challenge.

Finally, at the Maroochy 2025 Community Visioning Summit what didn't work well was the poor acceptance of pre-developed scenarios by the Community Taskforce. These alternative scenarios were seen as pre-ordained and manipulating the polling of the preferred scenario by participants. It is believed that developing the scenarios on the day would have created greater ownership of the scenarios for Maroochy's future,

though this arguably may not have been possible within the Summit program with over 300 participants.

### **What people learnt?**

The future may be questioned and not be perceived as a foregone conclusion. Communities realised that they do have the capacity to create or influence decisions, which can create alternative futures. *(During a community workshop, a sugar cane farmer had an epiphany when he realised that it is possible to think in terms of alternative futures rather than accept the reinscribed present into an anticipated future. His discovery of this new capacity within himself was enough to provide new hope and new motivations for a farmer who was facing great uncertainty in a collapsing industry).*

The visioning process raised the foresight capacity of participants, particularly by shifting the dominant paradigm from ethnocentric thinking about particular towns and communities within Maroochy towards worldcentric thinking – understanding the power of local actions in response to global forces of change. As a result, the future image of Eco City became the preferred shared vision for Maroochy. Also “Respondents remarked on how Maroochy 2025 improved their critical thinking (69%), changed their attitude towards the future (57%), or made them feel empowered to change their future (50%)” (Community survey no. 4, M2025, 2005, pp.81). Communities today, already contain immense ‘capacity in leadership and foresight’. Projects like *Maroochy 2025* can and did create the spaces for this capacity to be seen and valued.

### **Unexpected outcomes:**

What was totally unexpected was that individuals valued the opportunity to have their assumptions challenged and questioned. What was amazing to witness was an increase in passion and community capacity levels for: group motivations, social foresight, leadership, taskforces, and action planning teams. What was observed as an outcome was the rise of community localism, advocacy and a desire to become involved in dialogue pertaining to alternative futures. It was concluded that a region/shire/community could agree upon one collective vision for their future.

### **Tensions**

With any future orientated process, there will be a clash of worldviews. In *Maroochy 2025* a shift in worldviews occurred both within the individual and between individuals. The creation of a deeper and inner awareness of predominant and alternative worldviews gave the *Maroochy 2025* Community Taskforce the ability to create alternatives to the future. Hence, they changed their future by changing their thinking. Over 90% of participants of the final community survey (a post project evaluation) thought that Maroochy Shire would become a better place to live if the community worked together to achieve the shared vision. However, another tension revealed by the same survey showed that 55% of respondents were not confident that M2025 would become a way of life, in terms of decision-making or would improve local government leadership. Political cynicism runs too deep due to the communities’ poor perceptions of Council’s track record. Two years after the completion of the

M2025 vision and action plan, their cynicism has been proven as Council delays the official implementation of the vision.

## CONCLUSION

In essence, *Maroochy 2025* is about creating long-term, future-orientated policy options and consultation frameworks for changing communities and Government planners. *Maroochy 2025* aimed to be a means of empowering the many while creating energy and space to consider the alternatives for Maroochy Shire. *Maroochy 2025* gave the Maroochy community a way of anticipating forces of change and developing significant actions that lead towards their preferred future.

*Maroochy 2025* is currently lauded as one of the 'best-practice case studies'<sup>5</sup> in the arena of community planning by the Queensland Department of Local Government & Planning. One of the many pivotal events of *Maroochy 2025* was the ability to bring over 300 residents together and reach consensus on a preferred scenario for their future. This was a landmark event in anticipatory democracy, which highlighted the inherent potential and existing capacity and leadership that communities have in articulating common futures.

Using methods from Futures Studies in community planning and consultation can provide greater opportunity for active participation by all types of stakeholders or opinion holders. Engaging the full community in the identification of issues, trends, change drivers, probable scenarios and visions, can create a more representative articulation of preferred images for the future. A community can actively influence the planning and policy-making decisions that directly affect it.

In the long term, insights and perspectives gained by undertaking community visioning, especially through Anticipatory Action Learning methods are expected to provide local governments with a framework for transformational change. However, there are many who are still sceptical as to whether *Maroochy 2025* will change Local Government Planning and Policy, yet recognise that the *Maroochy 2025* experience has left a positive personal impact in terms of the development of critical thinking, changed attitudes and empowerment.

The *Maroochy 2025* Community Visioning Project has happened as a result of a growing and emerging localization of planning and governance processes within Australian communities. The need to own the decisions that determine a community's future and to share the responsibility for creating such a future highlights the arrival of sophisticated, intellectually savvy, and cohesive communities who are no longer prepared to be recipients of a faceless, professionalised bureaucratic society. The effectiveness of the 'community taskforce' model, as seen in *Maroochy 2025*, indicates a growth in residential communities and associations who are eager and willing to engage in local projects that offer participatory opportunities.

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<sup>5</sup> David Grogan, *Best Practice Guidelines: Corporate and Operational Planning* Draft Version 1.0630 Brisbane: Queensland Govt. Dept. of Local Govt., Planning, Sport & Recreation, June 2004, p. 39.

The results of projects like *Maroochy 2025* are a wake up call to planners, governments, and business alike. Evidence gained from statistical evaluation of the *Maroochy 2025* project clearly demonstrates that communities value the opportunity to question their own assumptions about the future and of those who make the decisions on their behalf.

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