

Hunter Environmental Institute

Terms of Reference

Note: These Terms of Reference set out the details of the Hunter Environmental Institute operations, specifying details of operations under the Model Constitution as supplied by NSW Fair Trading relevant under the Associations Incorporation Act 2009.

This Terms of Reference applies as of 17 October 2024.

1. Background and history

The Hunter Environmental Institute (HEI) was established in 1988 to provide a forum for the interaction of people working in environmentally oriented fields in the Hunter Region. Over time HEI has grown to involve people working in environmentally oriented fields across in the neighbouring regions of the Central Coast and Mid-North Coast.

This includes environmental scientists, ecologists, and engineers who work on projects ranging from ecosystem preservation and wildlife conservation to sustainable construction and pollution control. These professionals are often employed by government agencies, private companies, and non-profit organizations, and they seek platforms like HEI to collaborate, share knowledge, and stay informed about the latest developments in their fields.

HEI's audience also includes academics, such as university professors, lecturers, and research students who focus on environmental science and related disciplines. These individuals are interested in networking opportunities, staying updated on research trends, and finding collaboration opportunities for projects.

Local and regional government officials who participate in creating and enforcing environmental policies also form a significant part of HEI's audience, as they look to engage with experts and gather insights that can inform policy decisions aimed at protecting and sustaining the environment in their communities.

HEI is a non-profit organisation, managed by an Executive Committee and operating under a formal Constitution as an incorporated association.

2. Vision and Purpose

Our vision is to provide a platform for the ongoing connection and engagement of environmental professionals, students and volunteers in the Hunter, Central and Mid-North Coast regions, NSW, Australia.

Our purpose is to build long-term partnerships with industry, business, government, and the community in promoting environmental sustainability in our region and beyond.

Specifically, the vision of HEI is to foster a sustainable world through environmental professionalism. HEI is committed to providing a platform that facilitates ongoing connection and engagement among environmental professionals, students, and volunteers in the Hunter Region.

By promoting knowledge exchange and fostering multidisciplinary connections, HEI aims to enhance environmental practices not just within the profession, but also across the broader community. The institute envisions building long-term partnerships with industry, business, government, and the community to promote environmental sustainability both regionally and beyond.

HEI's purpose is rooted in the propagation and promotion of knowledge and skills among those involved in the environmental field. By disseminating information related to various environmental disciplines, HEI seeks to increase awareness and foster the adoption of best practices. The institute is also dedicated to providing impartial commentary and assessments on environmental issues when appropriate, thus contributing to informed decision-making.

Through seminars, dedicated events, field trips, and educational support such as student prizes and scholarships, HEI ensures that its members stay informed about key challenges and developments in environmental issues. Additionally, HEI offers valuable learning opportunities and access to a network of like-minded individuals, all aimed at advancing the field of environmental management.

3. Values

Our members will be environmental professionals and practitioners, volunteers, academics, and school/tertiary students interested in local and regional environmental issues in the Hunter, Central and Mid-North Coast regions of NSW.

In order to fulfil our purpose and vision, we aim to provide services that give our members:

- Education
- Networking
- Opportunities

To fulfil our purpose and vision, HEI is focused on providing our members with valuable services that include education, networking, and opportunities for professional and personal growth. We offer educational programs through seminars, workshops, and guest speaker events that cover a broad range of environmental topics, ensuring that our members are well-informed and equipped with the latest knowledge and skills.

Networking is at the heart of HEI's mission, as we believe that connecting like-minded individuals can lead to collaborative efforts that address environmental challenges. Additionally, we are committed to creating opportunities for our members to contribute to and benefit from the community, whether through participation in field trips, involvement in special projects, or access to scholarships and student prizes.

By fostering a strong, interconnected community, HEI is not only advancing environmental best practices but also empowering individuals to take an active role in shaping a sustainable future. Our focus on education, networking, and opportunities ensures that members can make meaningful contributions to environmental management and advocacy in their regions, ultimately helping to build a more sustainable world.

We achieve these values through fostering an environment where members can:

- Cross disciplinary boundaries to ask new questions, develop new methods, and generate new forms of knowledge and awareness in the environmental field.
- Connect with other members with diverse backgrounds through attending seminars and events.
- Promote and develop the field of Environmental Science and Management, Environmental Engineering and Sustainable Development.

4. Aims and Objectives

The aims of the Hunter Environmental Institute are to:

- Propagate and promote the knowledge and skills of those involved in the environmental field.
- Disseminate information related to environmental disciplines to practitioners and the community.
- Increase environmental awareness in the Hunter, Central and Mid-North Coast regions.
- Promote the advancement of environmental best practices.

These will be achieved through the following objectives:

- Seminar presentations and dedicated events by guest speakers on a broad range of environmental topics.
- Fostering and implementing internships.
- Field trips to sites of interest, and
- Supporting the development of environmental science and management education through student prizes and scholarships.

5. HEI Membership

Membership of the group is open to all individuals interested in environmental professionals and practitioners, volunteers, academics, and school/tertiary students interested in local and regional environmental issues in the Hunter, Central and Mid-North Coast regions of NSW, Australia.

The group will strive to ensure that membership is representative of the regions' community structure and profile (in relation to age, gender, cultural background, socioeconomic status, precinct etc) as much as possible.

All members will agree to abide by the rules of the group, as set out in this document.

5.1. Association Membership and Annual Fee

HEI has three membership classes:

- Corporate members:
 - **Gold Package - \$2500 which includes the following:**
 - Introduce and host an event.
 - Live plug at opening and closing of event for exposure.
 - Brand promotion on brochures, flyers, and social media as well as on slides at the events
 - Naming rights for 1 or 2 events
 - Two free tickets and four reduced member tickets per event
 - Opportunity to put up banners and marketing at events and tables.
 - **Silver Package - \$500 which includes the following:**
 - Host mention of sponsors name at events
 - Brand promotion at end of event on slides
 - Two reduced member tickets per event
 - **Catering and Speaking Package \$250 (per event), which includes the following:**
 - Host mention of sponsors name at events
 - Brand promotion at end of event on slides
 - One reduced price ticket to specific event (one event only)
- Individual (professional) members – \$40 for 12 months
- Seniors and concession (Student) members – \$25 for 12 months

Fees apply to and are valid for each calendar year. Memberships are valid for 12 months from the date of purchase.

Joining as a member at any class allows:

- Access discounted tickets to our events throughout the year
- Support the sponsorship of local environmental students.

5.2. Eligibility for membership

Individuals become a member of the group by completing a membership form and paying an annual fee. Annual fee categories vary by membership type and are a requirement to be a member to be able to receive member benefits.

Membership entitles employees of an organisation or individuals to:

- Attend HEI seminars and events at a discounted rate.
- Network and build their professional network and personal brand through HEI's sizable member base.
- Access to different avenues to build both technical and non-technical skills that will help them further their professional career.
- Find and create opportunities for collaboration and innovation, and

- Promote their services to a relevant professional audience.

What is the value of membership?

Membership in the Hunter Environmental Institute (HEI) offers unique value propositions tailored to both individuals and corporate entities, each designed to meet specific needs within the environmental sector. For individual members, including professionals, students, and seniors, HEI provides access to a rich array of educational resources, networking opportunities, and a platform for advocacy. Members benefit from discounted tickets to events, seminars, and workshops that focus on modern technologies, innovative projects, and future opportunities in the Hunter region. These events offer a safe and inclusive environment where members can connect with others in the field, share ideas, and collaborate on projects.

The community-oriented approach of HEI supports the growth and development of environmental knowledge and practices, fostering a network where individuals can learn from one another and contribute to the advancement of sustainable development.

For corporate members, HEI offers a range of packages that provide significant exposure and engagement opportunities. The Gold Package, for instance, allows corporate members to introduce and host events, benefit from brand promotion across various platforms, including brochures, flyers, social media, and event slides. This package also includes naming rights for events, free and discounted event tickets, and the opportunity to display banners and marketing materials at events. The Silver Package and Catering and Speaking Package offer scaled-down options that still provide valuable brand visibility and engagement with the HEI community. Corporate membership is ideal for organisations looking to position themselves as leaders in environmental stewardship and to connect with a network of professionals and stakeholders committed to sustainability.

Overall, HEI's membership structure ensures that both individuals and corporations receive tailored benefits that enhance their ability to contribute to and benefit from the environmental community in the region. Whether through education, networking, or advocacy, HEI provides a platform that supports the professional and organisational goals of its members, while also advancing the broader mission of promoting outstanding environmental practices.

6. HEI Executive Committee

The HEI Executive Committee will govern the group.

6.1. Responsibilities of the HEI Executive Committee

The HEI Executive Committee will be responsible for:

- Appointing the executive staff.
- Reviewing the group's activities.
- Supporting the executive and members in operational activities.
- To set a clear strategic direction for the HEI committee to align its activities with the purpose and mission of HEI

- Signing off on the administration for the group, including reviewing the financial accounting and record keeping.
- Annual reporting for the HEI, including reporting to the Department of Fair Trading for compliance as an incorporated association.
- Ensuring group activities are planned and organised according to the standards as defined by the group; and
- Regularly convening meetings of the Executive Committee.

6.2. Composition of the HEI Executive Committee

The HEI Executive Committee will consist of at least 7, and no more than 16 financial members of the group. Executive Committee Members will fill the roles listed in Section 6.3, alongside general committee members.

6.3. Key roles within the HEI Executive Committee

The Executive Committee will include a Chair, Deputy Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, and other roles agreed by the group.

Roles of the Executive Committee are summarised below and within the Matrix presented in Attachment 1.

6.3.1. Chair

The Chair will be responsible for the chairing and ensuring proper conduct within Committee meetings. They will also represent the group in public dealings such as with the media and other organisations.

6.3.2. Deputy Chair

The Deputy Chair will consult with the Chair and assist in performing the duties of the Chair where required.

6.3.3. Secretary

The Secretary shall prepare materials for Committee meetings under the direction of the Chair (compose and distribute the agenda, and prepare and distribute the minutes, follow up on actions). The Secretary will be responsible for managing the documentation for the Executive Committee and collecting proper documentation from the Executive.

6.3.4. Treasurer

The Treasurer shall manage and review the finances of the group, according to the decisions of the Executive Committee, including keeping appropriate records and documentation. The Treasurer will also be responsible for reporting on financial affairs of the HEI to the NSW Department of Fair Trading to ensure compliance continues of our status as an Incorporated Association.

6.3.5. Events Manager

The Events Manager shall coordinate events with critical inputs developed by other supporting committee members.

6.3.6. Communications and Marketing Manager

The Communications and Marketing Manager shall be responsible for maintaining an active presence in relevant media (e.g. Website Management and social media). Draft media will be endorsed by the Events Manager and/or the Chair prior to publishing.

6.3.7. Intern Leader

The Intern Leader will support interns in the organisation in their professional development and function as a mentor to interns.

6.3.8. Other Executive Committee Members

Other Executive Committee Members will support activities of the Executive Committee as available.

6.4. HEI Executive Committee Code of Conduct

All Executive Committee members will:

- Perform their duties with integrity, honesty, and fairness.
- Actively participate in group meetings and activities.
- Provide feedback and advice or ideas as appropriate.
- Show respect to their peers, and others during discussion group meetings.
- Contact the Chair, Secretary, or an appropriate group member within a reasonable timeframe if they cannot attend meetings, activities, or events.
- Attend at least 75% of Executive Committee meetings within each year.
- Attend at least 50% of HEI seminars or events within each year unless there are extenuating personal or work circumstances.
- Event price tickets can be waived if you are an Executive Committee member.

6.5. HEI Executive Committee Election and Terms

Elections for the roles of Chairperson, Deputy Chair, Secretary and Treasurer will be conducted at a special meeting in November (or around this time) each year.

Other Executive Committee roles will be allocated based on a volunteer basis. No payment will be made for any HEI Executive position.

All current financial members of the group can be nominated for these positions and vote at the special meeting.

6.6. Retirement from HEI Executive Committee

The Chairperson can retire an Executive Committee member who fails to meet ground rules outlined in this document. This must be conducted in accordance with the grievance process outlined in Section 8.

If a member wishes to retire voluntarily, they should provide written notification to the Chairperson. Once an Executive Committee member has retired, a replacement member can be elected at an ordinary meeting of the Executive Committee.

7. Operational Management of HEI

7.1. Meeting protocols

The Executive Committee will meet regularly, ideally monthly but at least every two months, to review progress and plan for upcoming activities. Additional meetings can be scheduled as required.

Any member of the group can suggest agenda items for discussion at meetings. Agenda items are to be forwarded to the Secretary at least 2 working days before the next scheduled meeting date. Non-members can attend group meetings on invitation.

The Chair will ensure the proper running of the meeting. The Secretary will record meeting minutes and circulate to Executive Committee members via email. The date for the next meeting is to be set before a meeting concludes and can be changed closer to the date if conflicts arise provided adequate notice is given to all Executive Committee members.

It is the responsibility of all Executive Committee members to contact the Secretary if they have any comments on the minutes or cannot attend the suggested meeting time.

A quorum of approximately 4 to 5 attendees of the Executive Committee members is required for the meeting to be recognised as an authorised meeting for decisions to be valid.

7.2. Group communications within the Executive Committee

The primary communication method will be via email. The Secretary will maintain a contact list, as well as an email contact list to let members and other community members know about upcoming events, opportunities, and meeting minutes.

Additionally, the Committee does communicate via other secondary forms of media, such as a WhatsApp chat.

Major decisions, consultations, and activities of the group will be recorded in Executive Committee meeting minutes and then a summary can be emailed to general HEI members where required.

7.3. Communication to members and the public

The Chairperson will represent the group as a whole in dealings with the media and other organisations, or other members as authorised by the committee.

7.4. Decision-making process

Major decisions need to be made at Executive Committee meetings. Major decisions include those that involve:

- Initiating a new project, initiative, or event.
- Using the group's name publicly, for example when speaking with the media, representing the group publicly, or as support for a grant application; or

- Managing group funds.

Decisions should be unanimous wherever possible. If consensus is not possible, then a vote can be taken by financial members at an Executive Committee meeting.

Minor decisions can be made via email by responses from the equivalent of a quorum from Executive Committee members within a reasonable response time, nominally no longer than one working week.

7.5. Financial Management

All membership fees and other funds collected by the group will be used only for group activities and not for personal gain by members.

All decisions about spending group funds will be made at Executive Committee meetings and recorded in meeting minutes. The Treasurer shall manage the finances of the group, according to the decisions of the Executive Committee, including keeping appropriate records and documentation.

7.6. Conflicts of Interest

Disclosures of any conflict of interest, particularly pecuniary interests, need to be made by group members when appropriate and be recorded in the minutes. A pecuniary interest is an interest that a person has in a matter because of a reasonable likelihood or expectation of appreciable financial gain or loss to the person or another person with whom the person is associated.

8. Grievances

Members of the group are committed to reaching a speedy and just resolution of any disputes or grievances that may arise and that may threaten the harmonious functioning of the group. All members will follow the procedures set out below.

This procedure refers to disputes:

- Between group members.
- By a member regarding a group process; or
- By a member regarding a resolution of the group; or
- By any external party or member of the public.

8.1 Grievances Procedure

The dispute must be articulated in writing and sent to the Chair. The Chair must acknowledge receipt of this document within two days. The Chair will use his/her discretion to bring the issue to the next ordinary Executive Committee meeting or call an extraordinary meeting.

When raised at the meeting all people involved in the dispute will be given the right to be heard.

The matter should be heard with all Executive Committee members present, unless they have advised in writing that they are aware there is a dispute resolution meeting being held and they are unable to attend.

The Chair will call for a motion from the Executive Committee. For example, to seek further advice, to refer the matter, to dismiss the complaint. The motion will be voted on by all members present at the meeting. The outcome of the decisions of the Executive Committee will be detailed by the Chair to the individual who lodged the complaint in writing within two days.

An Executive Committee decision may be reviewed where:

- Latest information has become known that was not available when the original decision was made; or
- The Executive Committee has become aware of an error in previous information that was used to make the decision.

9. Period review

This Terms of Reference document is to be reviewed by the HEI Executive Committee every two years. The next date for review is October 2026.

Attachment 1 - Responsibility Matrix

	R	Responsibility	Primary Responsibility to action					
	U	Understanding	Understanding of requirements/processes to complete if needed to fill in primary persons role					
	S	Support	Support of the primary person undertaking the role					
	E	Endorsement	Endorse outcomes of task (i.e. social media post, statements, event distribution, agenda/minutes)					
	Chair	Deputy Chair	Secretary	Treasurer	Events Manager	Communications and Marketing Manager/Website and social media	Intern leader	Committee Members and Interns
Leading Meetings and HEI changes	R	R2	U	U				
Communication management (check HEI email address - respond and send correspondence)	s	s	R	s				
Preparing Agendas/Minutes	E	s	R	U				
Managing accounts (insurances, website fees etc.)	U	U	U	R	U	U		
Managing event preparation and running	s	s	s		R	s	s	s
Website and Social Media Management and Maintenance	E	U	s		E	R		U
Follow up on actions/administration of actions from meetings	s	R	s		U	U		U
Intern recruitment and development	s	s	s	s	s	s	R	s
identification of actions/direction for institute	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R