

Cooling the City Masterclass

COUNCIL NAME

Penrith City Council

WEB ADDRESS

penrithcity.nsw.gov.au

SIZE

405 km²

POPULATION

209,210

Overview

Penrith City Council held its Cooling the City Masterclass in February 2020, attended by over 350 built environment professionals from across NSW, Victoria and the ACT. The sold-out event featured international, national and regional experts who explored practical solutions to the challenge of urban heat in the context of our changing climate. Drawing on the latest research, presenters put forward practical case studies, leading planning approaches directing the state and the business case for action across all sectors. Council has ensured ongoing leverage from the Masterclass through the online promotion of the presentations and new partnerships for on-ground action.

Background

As our climate changes a key challenge is more intense and frequent heatwaves in summer. Western Sydney is particularly vulnerable to extreme heat. Penrith City Council formally identified heat as a key climate risk through a climate change risk assessment process that led to the adoption of the *Cooling the City Strategy* in 2015. It seeks to ensure that cooler, healthier, and more liveable urban spaces are a priority. Since adopting the Strategy, Council undertook actions within its own operations to create a cooler and more liveable city but was keen to do more about the contribution of new developments to urban heat, in particular development around the Western Sydney Aerotropolis. By hosting the Cooling the City Masterclass, Penrith City Council took on the leadership challenge to engage with built environment professionals to go beyond business as usual and to create cooler urban developments.

Objectives

The overarching theme of the Masterclass was that cooling the city makes good business sense and collaboration is essential if change is to be achieved. Specific event objectives included:

1. Attract a significant crowd and bring together a broad range of stakeholders to activate important discussions
2. Deliver a modern and progressive event that was more 'TED Talk' than traditional conference
3. Inspire attendees through new knowledge, tools and ideas to inform their professional practice and build the momentum for action
4. Promote the knowledge and messages more widely than to just those in attendance through the filming and release of presentations after the event
5. Stimulate on ground improvements to urban development across Sydney that are adapted to our changing climate.

Implementation

The Cooling the City Masterclass was resourced and coordinated by Council, with staff planning, facilitating and promoting the entire event. February 2020 was chosen as it allowed a marketing campaign to be delivered over the summer months. As it transpired Australia experienced the most catastrophic bushfire season experienced that was fanned by unprecedented levels of extreme heat across the country and one of the driest years on record. The Masterclass was perfectly timed to take advantage of the surge in interest in climate change mitigation and adaptation amongst the wider community. Media articles on urban heat and the impacts of climate change were also highlighted in the Cooling the City Masterclass eNews sent out in the lead up to the event.

to strategic partners across Western Sydney. Showcase exhibition stalls were provided free of charge to organisations selected through an expression of interest process. The Q Theatre at the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre was chosen as the venue.

Presenters were invited based on their expertise, knowledge and active work in this space. The majority of speakers provided in-kind support. Collectively they put forward practical case studies of best practice, the business case for action across all sectors, the leading planning approaches in NSW, and the latest research.



Outcomes

The Masterclass was successful in addressing a strategic priority for the region and it brought together the right stakeholders to help achieve the vision for Penrith and Western Sydney. It attracted extremely strong interest, selling out with over 350 attendees. A broad range of professionals attended, including from Victoria and the ACT. The Cooling the City Masterclass eNews created to promote the event and draw attention to different aspects of climate adapted urban development, attracted over 500 subscribers.

Feedback on the Masterclass was highly positive, citing excellent content and speakers and a great 'vibe' with like-minded attendees. The presentation of evidence and industry trends for action around reducing heat and sustainable urban planning was strongly commended

Videos of each presentation were posted on Council's [YouTube channel](#) with over 700 views on the playlist at the time of writing and will be used as a teaching resource for students undertaking a Masters of Planning. Many businesses, research organisations and councils have since approached the organisers to explore new opportunities. A heat sensor research project with WSU that tracks localised temperatures is just one of the projects that has resulted.

Key Learnings

Councils' Sustainability and Resilience Team had never delivered an event of this nature or scale. A great deal was learned about how to cater for different needs and the messaging and themes would attract people to attend and provide value. Taking a strategic approach was important to achieving the objectives for the event and the ongoing outcomes. One example is the ongoing use of the presentations for teaching and community engagement. These opportunities will be further used to promote the Masterclass videos as a useful resource.

The Masterclass provided the impetus for Penrith Councillors and Council staff to review the Cooling the City Strategy and undertake other actions including the preparation of a Green Grid Strategy and planning reforms in line with the Local Strategic Planning Statement. Council is exploring further project opportunities with other organisations. Interest has been shown from businesses including Lendlease and Colorbond, government organisations including Sydney Water and the Greater Sydney Commission, and research organisations including Western Sydney University, Macquarie University, and CSIRO.

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This project was the 2020 winner of the Climate Change Adaptation Award at the LGNSW Excellence in the Environment Awards