

Sustainable Wollongong 2030

COUNCIL NAME

Wollongong City Council

WEB ADDRESSwollongong.nsw.gov.au**SIZE**

684 square kilometres

POPULATION

216, 071

Overview

Sustainable Wollongong 2030 outlines Councils' commitment to sustainability for both council operations and the community. It is an overarching document that brings together and plays an important role in providing direction and support for councils' many and varied environmental strategies, programs and plans. Extensive community and staff engagement activities were undertaken to create the strategy and to start the process of embedding sustainability and climate change considerations in all council decision making. Engagement with the Aboriginal community also enabled Council to incorporate invaluable stories and artwork into the strategy.

Background

Over several years Council has demonstrated commitment to creating a sustainable and climate resilient city including:

- incorporating the the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Council's Community Strategic Plan;
- joining the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy (GCoM) program in 2017;
- declaring a State of Climate Emergency in August 2019; and
- adopting emissions reduction targets of net zero by 2030 for Council operations and net zero by 2050 for city-wide emissions in December 2019.

There are a number of existing environmental strategies, plans and programs that are delivered without an overarching strategic context. To assist with the integration of environmental considerations in all Council decision making it was decided to create an overarching Sustainability Strategy. The main objectives of the project were to:

- create a strategy that consolidated all environmental priorities into one document;
- comply with GCoM requirements, including achieving our emissions reduction targets;
- effectively integrate the SDGs into strategic documents;
- undertake effective community engagement activities to ensure that the strategy is reflective of current perspectives and values prior to and whilst writing the document; and
- create a governance structure to allow for the implementation of actions to be monitored and evaluated and reported on in a timely manner.

Implementation

To prepare a strategy that reflected community sentiment, Council conducted a mix of face to face and online engagement activities asking the community to reflect on the old strategy as well as what was important to them and why. There were 220 face to face participants with 295 unique suggestions and 84 votes, and 134 online participants with 205 unique ideas and 1125 votes. Council also conducted engagement activities with the Aboriginal community to incorporate their connection to country.

Staff workshops analysed the community's comments and proposed actions for inclusion in the strategy. Councils existing strategies, plans and programs were also analysed to integrate them into the new strategy. The SDGs were mapped for inclusion in the strategy, and alignment with the Community Strategic Plan (CSP) and Delivery Program (DP).

The draft Sustainable Wollongong Strategy was placed on public exhibition and was overwhelmingly supported by the community and was adopted by Council in November 2020. Following the adoption of the Strategy, actions were updated in the CSP and DP and the operational plan. The implementation and monitoring of sustainability and climate change actions is facilitated through the Climate Action Steering Committee (CASC) and three functional Climate Action Working Groups (CAWGs).

The engagement activities, analysis and strategy development and design were completed by Council staff and not outsourced to consultants. The entire process of research, engagement, analysis, development, exhibition and adoption took around 2.5 years. This timeframe ensured that all activities were implemented properly and not rushed. The integration of sustainability and climate change considerations into Council operations is still ongoing.

Outcomes

The Sustainability Strategy is an overarching document that identifies clear pathways to create a sustainable and climate-healthy city. It contains six priority areas and associated goals to guide operations for the next 10 years. The Aboriginal perspective and traditional ways of living are key to a sustainable future and can be incorporated further in all Council's strategic planning documents. The new Strategy cover also features a commissioned artwork showing the Aboriginal Perspective of 'From the mountains to the sea, we value and protect our natural environment'.

Council is leading by example through:

- installing 538kW of solar PV on its facilities and committing to pursue a green energy PPA for large sites and street lights,
- implementing FOGO collections and landfill gas capture to reduce emissions,
- reviewing policies and plans and DCP chapters to incorporate sustainability and climate change considerations,
- developing a sustainable events guide and environmental education plan outlining pathways to work with our community
- developing partnerships with business and industry groups,
- planting more trees through Urban Greening, GreenPlan and natural area programs,
- implementing programs to control pest and weed species,
- monitoring water quality and the impacts of storms, and
- upgrading open space, parks, cycleways and shareways across the city.



Key Learnings

Council embarked on a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process which created an unprecedented level of trust with the community. Following community engagement, Council undertook several staff engagement activities across all divisions, creating a sense of ownership across the organisation. Learnings from the engagement process have been shared across the organisation and this process has been recognised as best practice, with a case study being written by Bang the Table.

Embedding sustainability considerations across the organisation is a challenging process that takes a significant amount of time and resources up front. Working with staff in the Strategic Planning business unit has been integral to embedding sustainability considerations into all strategic planning documents. Working with staff in Council's governance area has simplified the process of embedding these considerations in all new policy templates

Contact

Name: Jenny Haining
Position: Environmental Sustainability Officer
Phone: 02 4227 7437
Email: jhaining@wollongong.nsw.gov.au

This project was the 2021 winner of the Local Sustainability Award at the LGNSW Excellence in the Environment Awards