

Oceans of Waste

COUNCIL NAME

Warringah Council

WEB ADDRESS

warringah.nsw.gov.au

SIZE

150 square kilometres

POPULATION

140,741

Overview

Eighty per cent of marine debris comes from land-based sources such as litter and overflowing garbage bins. Although Warringah residents are good recyclers, ongoing campaigns are necessary to encourage active participation in reducing waste and living sustainably. Warringah Council's ongoing desire to find different ways to engage and influence residents led to an outstanding initiative called Oceans of Waste.

Council invited residents to compete to be part of a scientific expedition on a tall ship Yukon, in Sydney Harbour. The expedition would be a long lived and personally significant event, filmed and celebrated later at a gala event during National Recycling Week (NRW). By working closely with other inspirational leaders in environmental education and scientific research, Council aimed for participative empowerment and capacity building.



Photo: Trawling for plastic in the Sydney Harbour

Background

Marine debris has gained prominence in the media with an increasing number of people shocked by the amount of plastic waste distributed across the oceans of the world. Marine waste is found below the surface, on the ocean floor, or cleaned up by council when onshore, meaning residents do not necessarily know it is a local issue or that their overflowing bins can contribute to the marine debris. Oceans of Waste is an ongoing campaign to ensure residents are aware that local actions help to maintain environmental health.

Council sponsored the Yukon when it berthed in Sydney Harbour and residents competed for a place on the ship by completing an online quiz. Council's objectives for this campaign are as follows:

- Raise general awareness of waste in the marine environment, and emphasise how our actions can maintain environmental health.
- Promote engagement and learning through a multi-faceted environmental education campaign including an online marine debris quiz, the tall ship expedition, films, art and incentives at events. Promotion was executed via social media, newsletters and calendars.
- Build capacity to reduce waste through sustainable living practices, e.g. lower reliance on plastic bags; buying items packaged from biodegradable materials; not overfilling bins, and refilling water bottles.

Implementation

Council planned an ongoing series of publications, events, activities and exhibitions throughout the year to promote ongoing consciousness of the issues, engagement and participation. Social media was a key tool in disseminating information about the campaign. Council used its website, Facebook, the Mayor's Twitter account and placed the Oceans of Waste film on YouTube. In addition, the not for profit (NFP) agencies and the artists with blogs featured our events and activities on their active sites.

Key timeline events:

- Jun-Aug 2013: Detailed planning and implementation for Yukon Expedition and gala event during NRW event. Liaison with NFP agencies, artists, libraries, Communications Team
- Aug-Sept 2013: Contract film maker, finalise Yukon details, get Two Hands Project and artists on board, design on-line quiz for residents, promotion of events
- Sept 2013: online quiz
- October 2013: Yukon Expedition, Warringah Matters Newsletter
- Jan 2014: distribute Waste and Recycling calendar with "Too lovely to litter"

Budget: The cost of hiring the ship, film maker and photography were under \$6,000. Two Hands Project provided 76 hours of voluntary work. All design and marketing was done in-house. Advertising costs were minimal and promotion through other organisations was free.

Outcomes

116 residents completed the online marine debris quiz. Several residents in their evaluation of the NRW event indicated increased awareness of uncontained rubbish with a promise to change their behaviour. Thirty three volunteered to collect beach litter at Council events and 89 children created pieces of artwork made from marine debris collected from the beach.

Experiential learning is a powerful tool and has helped Council work towards behavioural change. Council shared its experience with other councils who may trawl for plastics this year. Warringah will sponsor the Yukon again and are planning to invite local secondary students in 2015.

Key Learnings

Council found the multiple communication methods and partnerships used in this campaign helped to garner a wide audience. Social media became a key way of disseminating

information about the campaign, about what Council was doing and what others could do to protect and enhance our natural ecosystems.

The partnerships developed with the NFP agencies proved invaluable, they were the backbone of this campaign. Council provides the opportunities and infrastructure to run campaigns but financially it would not be possible without them. It is the NFP agency's knowledge, participation and volunteers that broadened the reach and engagement with residents. These NFP agencies are the modern face of action and change, it is this type of engagement that helps us develop long lasting community relationships, which will benefit us now and in future ventures.

Overall, Council has learnt that once-off topic events are not adequate in creating cultural and behavioural change. It is essential to have varied, engaging and ongoing campaigns in order to achieve long term changes.

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This project was the 2014 winner of the Communication, Education & Empowerment Award at the LGNSW Excellence in the Environment Awards.