

Mount Alexander Shire Council

# Environment Strategy 2015-2025



# Mayor's Foreword

This Environment Strategy has been developed as the nations of the world are preparing to meet in Paris to see whether they can agree on a global approach to reduce the emission of climate changing gases. By the time our Shire's new Strategy is written in 2025 we will know whether humanity has acted quickly enough to preserve a habitable planet for future generations. What a momentous decade.

The climate is already changing and impacting on our country and Shire. That impact will increase, with more heatwaves, droughts, floods and fires. This will affect our food growers, our home and work environments, our cost of living, our beloved country.

A combined effort is needed to strengthen our resilience, mitigate the impact of and reduce our contribution to climate change. Our Shire is blessed with great expertise, passion, energy and wisdom and these strengths support Council's efforts and keep us accountable. The community's input into this Strategy has been of vital importance in shaping the document and is highly valued and appreciated.

In this Strategy we have promised to undertake actions that are under the direct control of Council including generating more renewable energy, embedding environmental cost and benefit into all of our decision making and reviewing our planning scheme. We seek to lead by example both to the community and the local government sector. We have also promised to work collaboratively with our local groups, citizens and government agencies to care for our country.

Many of the Strategy's priority areas are linked such as climate change and greenhouse gas from waste. The Strategy's action plans will deliver activities that drive change, from urban waterways to waste management, asset management to water use. These plans either already exist and are being implemented or will be developed with further opportunities for input from the community. Effective reporting by Council will ensure transparency and accountability to the community and other levels of government.

The Strategy will be reviewed after the release of each new Council Plan, at the start of each new term of Council.

Finally, it's important to recognise the substantial contribution of the many local organisations undertaking significant environmental and sustainability work across the Shire. Some wonderful outcomes are being achieved by The Hub Foundation, Renewable Newstead, Mount Alexander Sustainability Group, Connecting Country and the many Landcare groups and 'Friends of' groups in our region.

Council invites everyone to work together throughout this momentous decade.



Cr Christine Henderson

# Traditional Owner Acknowledgment

The Mount Alexander Shire Council (Council) acknowledges that the traditional owners of this land, the Dja Dja Wurrung people, proudly survive. They continue to practice their culture and customs.

Dja Dja Wurrung people experience a close cultural, spiritual, physical, social, historical and economic relationship with the land and waters that make up their country, which includes Mount Alexander Shire.

Council recognises the traditional and cultural association of Dja Dja Wurrung people to their country today.

Council recognises the Recognition and Settlement Agreement between the Victorian Government and the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation.



# Introduction

## Context

In the context of climate change, biodiversity decline and other trends, the decade ahead is a time for human culture to change.

The overarching challenge is to move from an exploitative relationship with our planet to a symbiotic one, both in spirit and action.

For example, by the rapid transition to renewable energy sources, the conscientious improvement of the condition of the natural environment and the development of a culture where waste is minimised.

This relationship will be realised by Council and the community together in partnership.



## Purpose

The purpose of the Environment Strategy 2015-2025 (the Strategy) is to clearly define and communicate Mount Alexander Shire Council's strategic approach to its environmental stewardship role for the period 2015-2025.

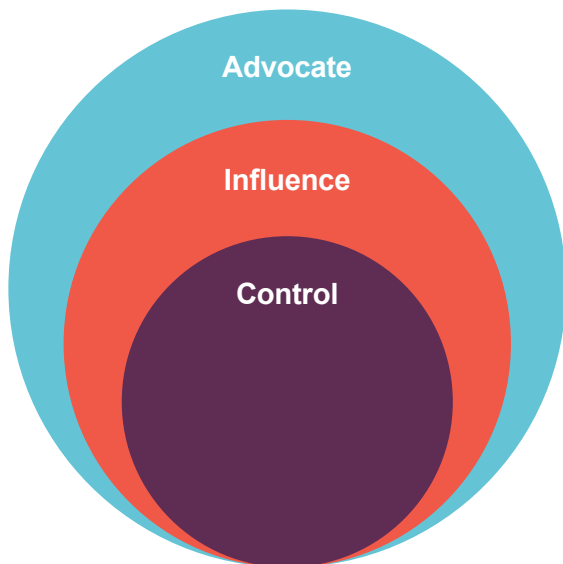


Figure 1: Scope of Council's operations and this Strategy

## Scope

The scope of the Strategy is limited to Council's operations as a local government organisation.

This scope includes those things that Council has control over, can influence significantly, or can advocate for (see Figure 1).

The Strategy scope does not include everything within the whole municipality.

## Actions and Revisions

As the Strategy has a long timeframe of ten years, detailed actions will be written in relevant key strategic tasks such as action plans and policies.

The development of detailed action plans will include community consultation and the final action plans will be publicly available where appropriate.

The key strategic tasks to be completed in any year will be included in the Annual Plan.

The Strategy will be reviewed every four years after the Council Plan has been finalised.

## Terms

In Mount Alexander Shire the terms 'sustainability' and 'environment' have often been used to distinguish between efforts focused on the built environment (sustainability) and efforts focused on the natural environment.

In this document the terms 'sustainability and environment' are used together to communicate the interconnectedness of the built and natural environment.

## Roles of Council

Council's operations are diverse and widespread. Council's core roles relate to the management of community infrastructure, the provision of community services and the enforcement of laws.

Community infrastructure includes roads, bridges, drains, buildings, walking/cycling paths, recreation facilities, and parks and gardens.

Community services include property services, home and community care services, recreational services, environmental services, and cultural and heritage services.

Council enforces State and local laws relating to matters such as land use planning, environment protection, public health, traffic and parking, and animal management.

Council regularly reviews its operations to ensure that it is continuously improving.

## Land Use Planning

Under Victoria's planning system local councils and the State Government develop planning schemes to control land use and development and to ensure the protection and conservation of land. Council is the responsible authority for issuing planning permits and administering the planning scheme. Some components of the planning scheme can be influenced by Council and the community and other components less so.

For example, the planning scheme has little capacity to control the design of buildings in residential areas. On the other hand, Council develops the Municipal Strategic Statement and selects the appropriate zones and overlays from the Victorian Planning Provisions. This provides Council with the ability to create overlays to protect significant natural environment assets, for example.

The community can also influence elements of the land use planning system. For example, a person who is affected by a planning permit application can advocate to the permit applicant, inspect plans and lodge a written objection to Council.

Community members can also be more proactively involved in influencing the planning system by taking part in community engagement around strategic land-use studies that will lead to changes to the planning scheme. The community can also lead discussions with developers or undertake their own developments to lead by example.

To learn more about the Victorian Planning Provisions and land use planning visit <http://www.dtpli.vic.gov.au/planning/about-planning>

# Strategy Development Process

## Legislation

Development of this Strategy has involved the consideration of relevant legislation and planning documents.

*The Victorian Local Government Act 1989* administers the local government sector in Victoria and requires that Council prepare:

- A Council Plan: a four year plan to be produced by Council shortly after each Council general election.
- A Long-Term Financial Plan: a rolling plan that outlines the financial and non-financial resources required to implement the Council Plan and any other plan adopted by the Council, for example this Strategy.
- A budget for each financial year.
- An Annual Report each financial year.

This Strategy is a key Council document and sits below the Council Plan.

An Annual Plan is developed each year to implement the Council Plan.

Key strategic tasks contained in this Strategy will be scheduled in Annual Plans and resourced through annual budgets.

Implementation of this Strategy will be reported in the Annual Report (see Figure 2).

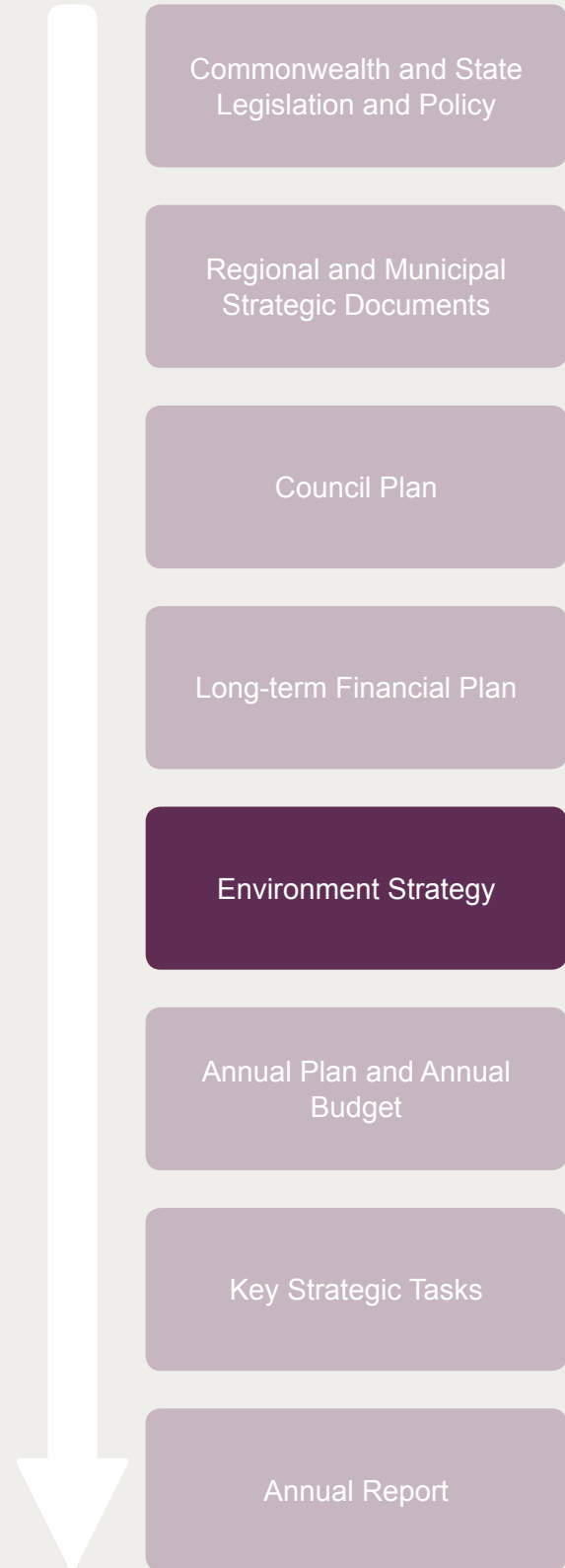


Figure 2: Planning Hierarchy

In addition to the Local Government Act, other key legislation includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- *The Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* which provides the national legal framework to protect and manage nationally and internationally important flora, fauna, ecological communities and heritage places.
- *The Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* which provides the key Victorian legislation for the conservation of threatened species and communities and for the management of potentially threatening processes.
- *The Victorian Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* which is the main legislation covering noxious weed and pest animal management in Victoria.
- *The Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972* which establishes the Trust for Nature and enables people to contribute to nature conservation by covenanting land or donating land or money.
- *The Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* which provides protection for all Aboriginal places, objects and human remains in Victoria.
- *The Victorian Environment Protection Act 1970* which creates the Environmental Protection Authority to administer the protection of air, water and land quality and noise pollution.
- *The Victorian Planning and Environment Act 1987* which is the framework for the planning, development and protection of land in Victoria.
- *The Victorian Building Act 1993* which provides for the regulation of building and building standards in Victoria. The National Construction Code outlines the energy efficiency requirements of buildings.

## Strategic Plans

A number of key planning documents have informed this Strategy.

- The Loddon Mallee South Regional Growth Plan identifies key settlements in our municipality and surrounding areas where growth is to be directed while avoiding sites of high natural hazard such as bushfire and flood, and protecting natural environment assets.
- Local community-based action plans have been developed for townships in the Shire to articulate their needs and aspirations. These plans provide place-based guidance to Council on a range of issues important to the community.
- Council's Project Priorities document outlines key projects that are central to the future growth and prosperity of the municipality.
- Other strategic plans of Council, such as the Economic Development Strategy, outline a strategic approach to specific topics.

In addition, strategic plans of relevant regional agencies such as the North Central Catchment Management Authority, the Loddon Mallee Waste and Resource Recovery Group and Commonwealth and State Government departments remain informative and instructive.

# Strategy Development Process

## Document Evaluation

Development of this Strategy involved an evaluation of the Mount Alexander Shire Council Environment Strategy 2011-2014. Recognising the strengths and weaknesses of the 2011-2014 document, this Strategy is a high-level, stand-alone, succinct document. Specific implementation actions will now be detailed only in supporting topic-based key strategic tasks, for example the Roadside Conservation Management Plan. This new approach will enable a clear planning hierarchy and more intensive community input on specific issues.

To ensure this Strategy is implemented successfully, a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation plan will be implemented. The evaluation questions for each of the eight priority areas are a key component of the monitoring and evaluation plan.

The community will be kept informed about implementation of this Strategy through Council's Sustainability and Environment E-newsletter. Community members can subscribe to receive the E-newsletter via Council's website.

## Community Engagement

One of the strengths of the former Environment Strategy was its recognition of the importance of the community and Council working together. This message has been emphasised by the community and Councillors during the development of this Strategy. Community engagement to develop this Strategy has included:

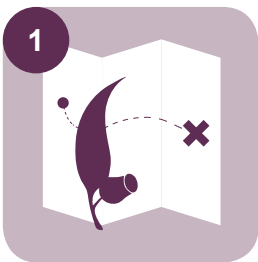
- A community survey (see Community Aspirations below).
- Six key stakeholder meetings.
- Four facilitated community meetings.
- A public comment period.
- Internal staff consultation.
- Communication with the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation.
- A meeting with Council's Youth Advisory Group.
- Individual meetings with community groups and individuals to discuss the final draft.



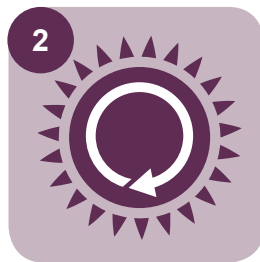


## Community Priorities

In developing this Strategy, the Mount Alexander Shire community was asked to select, from a list of 28 community derived options, their top five priorities. Council received 303 responses. Ranked in order, the respondent's top five priority areas were:



The planning scheme recognises and protects natural assets



Renewable energy



Environmentalism and sustainability become mainstream



Sustainable funding and support for Landcare and other community groups



Innovative waste management

*These five community priorities influence Council's environmental stewardship role.*

# Strategy

## Vision

The vision has continued on from the Environment Strategy 2011-2014. It speaks to the need for the community and Council to collaborate to create carbon neutral, low waste communities in healthy and thriving natural ecosystems.

*A Shire known as a place for sustainability, with healthy ecosystems in a rural/bushland environment and emitting zero nett carbon emissions.*

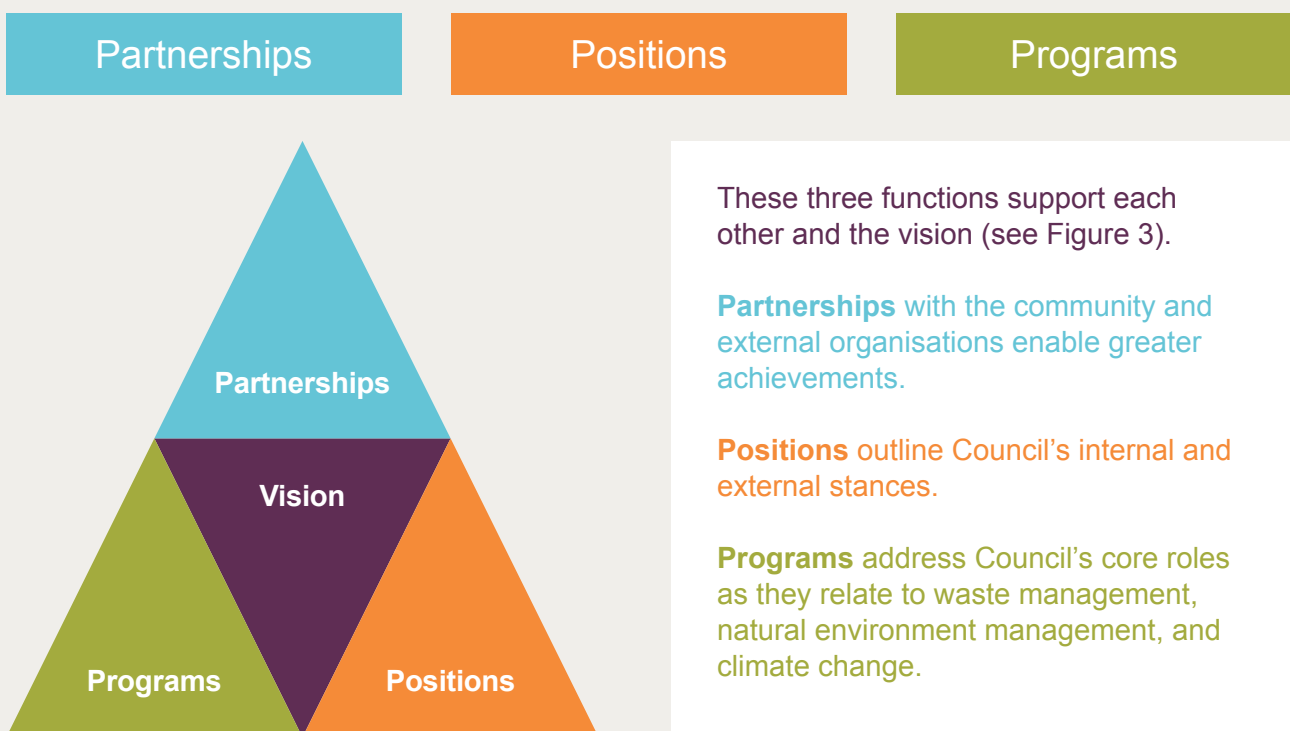
*A Council with a strong reputation for its environmental commitments, acknowledged as a leader in local rural sustainable development nationally and internationally.*

*Council has strong partnerships and relationships and leads with actions that strengthen the fabric and resilience of neighbourhoods and communities in the Shire, and is a hub of innovation in sustainable solutions.*

*A community aware, proud and active in caring for the environment and living sustainably, where land owners and managers actively protect biodiversity and are strongly engaged and supported by Council actions on the environment.*

## Functions

Council's vision will be realised in three ways:



These three functions support each other and the vision (see Figure 3).

**Partnerships** with the community and external organisations enable greater achievements.

**Positions** outline Council's internal and external stances.

**Programs** address Council's core roles as they relate to waste management, natural environment management, and climate change.

Figure 3: Council's three functions



## Priority Areas

The three functions encapsulate Council's eight strategic priority areas.

Partnerships	
1	Enable the community to take action
2	Collaborate with external organisations
Positions	
3	Council leads by example
4	Sustainability and Environment Team is a corporate resource
5	Reduce resource consumption across Council
Programs	
6	Improve resource recovery facilities and services
7	Protect natural environment assets
8	Integrate our response to climate change

## Reading the Priority Areas

The eight strategic priority areas are outlined on the following pages. Each priority area includes:

- A long-term goal that Council aspires to achieve in the next 10-25 years.
- An intermediate outcome that Council aims to achieve during the 10 year lifecycle of this Strategy.
- An evaluation question that will be used to measure achievement of the intermediate outcome as part of a more in-depth evaluation plan.
- Key strategic tasks that will be undertaken to achieve the intermediate outcome.
- Links to the community priority/s that are most pertinent to the priority area of Council.

# Enable the community to take action

Mount Alexander Shire is endowed with a community that is passionate and knowledgeable about sustainability and the environment and is energetic in taking action.

Council and the community will need to partner together to enable the vision of this Strategy to be achieved. This partnership will include formal memoranda of understanding with key community groups, the delivery of community behaviour change programs, the two-way provision of expert advice, the funding of community-based projects and the delivery of Council's land stewardship program.

Importantly, Council will continue to advocate to the State and Commonwealth Governments to enable the realisation of community aspirations related to sustainability and the environment. This advocacy work will include sustainable funding for Landcare and other community groups, better public transport connections and the implementation of key projects from local community plans.

## Long-term Goal

In partnership with Council, more residents and businesses are engaged in sustainability and environment activities.

## Intermediate Outcome

**Partnerships with the community deliver opportunities for residents and businesses to engage in sustainability and environment activities.**

## Evaluation Question

What opportunities have there been for the community to engage in sustainability and environment as a result of partnerships with Council?

## Key Strategic Tasks

- Continue to provide financial support to community groups, for example through the annual Community Grants Program.
- Develop and implement community engagement and behaviour change programs and initiatives.
- Develop and implement memoranda of understanding with key community groups.

## Link to Community Priorities



## Partnerships: Priority Area 2

# Collaborate with external organisations

Council will continue working with other councils to undertake ambitious sustainability and environment projects. Inter-council collaboration will occur through existing associations and through the development of new relationships and alliances.

Council will also continue to collaborate with other local and regional external organisations to ensure that the best interests of the municipality are progressed. For example, Council will collaborate with the relevant groups and external organisations to develop

a strategic plan for urban waterways within Castlemaine, Campbells Creek and Chewton.

When appropriate, Council will collaborate with external organisations, including Landcare and 'Friends of' groups, to advocate to the State and Commonwealth Governments.

### Long-term Goal

Sustainability and environment collaborations are central to Council operations and are delivering tangible community benefits.

### Intermediate Outcome

**Council maintains and develops collaborations with external organisations, and through these collaborations is working on ambitious sustainability and environment projects.**

### Evaluation Question

What evidence is there that Council has developed collaborations and that these are delivering tangible community benefits?

### Key Strategic Tasks

- Continue membership of the Loddon Mallee Waste and Resource Recovery Group.
- Establish a local government natural environment regional alliance.
- Continue membership of the Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance.
- Develop a strategic plan for urban waterways in Castlemaine, Campbells Creek and Chewton.

### Link to Community Priorities



# Council leads by example

Council, through leading by example, can help make environmentalism and sustainability mainstream in Mount Alexander Shire.

Council leadership can be expressed in many ways. For example, by developing evidence-based policy statements regarding issues such as climate change, by adopting cost effective approaches and appropriate eco-technologies such as LED streetlights and by using its unique statutory responsibilities to further sustainability and environment aims such as rate rebates for properties with a conservation covenant in place.

To make the greatest impact, Council will focus its leadership efforts on those areas where it has identified the greatest opportunity to improve its own operations and at the same time provide a leading example.

Council leadership will require a closer working relationship with the significant sustainability and environment expertise and wisdom in our community.

## Long-Term Goal

Council is recognised as a rural local government leader in sustainability and environment.

## Intermediate Outcome

**Council sustainability and environment leadership is commended by the Shire community and beyond.**

## Evaluation Question

What evidence is there that Council sustainability and environment leadership is recognised in the Shire community and more broadly?

## Key Strategic Tasks

- Develop policy and/or position statements relating to key issues.
- Use statutory responsibilities to influence better sustainability and natural environment outcomes.
- Advocate to the State and Commonwealth Governments.

## Link to Community Priorities



## Positions: Priority Area 4

# Sustainability and Environment Team is a corporate resource

Within Council's operations, improving the sustainability and environment of the Shire is the work and responsibility of all staff.

This priority area formalises the role of sustainability and environment staff in building the capacity of all staff to fully consider waste, the natural environment and climate change.

Full consideration of sustainability and environment requires Council to function in an integrated way. It is especially important that sustainability and environment is considered at the early scoping stage of projects or services

when every operational element can be taken into account. For example, the refurbishment of an existing significant infrastructure asset may change when climate change projections for the municipality are fully considered. Similarly, the character of a proposed subdivision plan may be altered when the contribution of remnant native vegetation to landscape amenity is considered.

### Long-Term Goal

Council projects and services improve the sustainability and environment of the Shire.

### Intermediate Outcome

**All Council projects and services incorporate suitable environment and sustainability measures.**

### Evaluation Question

What evidence is there that sustainability and environment priorities and considerations are embedded in Council operations?

### Key Strategic Tasks

- Identify, rank and reduce the significant environmental impacts of all Council projects and services.
- Utilise internal sustainability and environment expertise particularly at project scoping stages.
- Enable and encourage staff to fully consider sustainability and environment matters.

### Link to Community Priorities



# Reduce resource consumption across Council

Council routinely seeks to minimise resource consumption in the delivery of projects and services. Examples include water sensitive urban landscape design, a paper-free digital records management system and energy efficiency measures.

Council also routinely seeks to make wise use of existing assets through thoughtful operation, maintenance and renewal.

A future focus for Council is to further improve its sustainable procurement practices. Sustainable procurement is about reducing the adverse, and increasing the beneficial, environmental, social and economic impacts of the products and services Council purchases or uses. Sustainable procurement relates to everything Council purchases or uses from catering to concrete.

## Long-Term Goal

A Council culture of minimised consumption.

## Intermediate Outcome

**Council implements best practice in sustainable procurement and resource use.**

## Evaluation Question

To what extent is Council demonstrating best practice sustainable procurement and resource use activities?

## Key Strategic Tasks

- Implement the Sustainable Procurement Policy.
- Develop and implement new Sustainable Water Use Plan.
- Continue to improve resource efficiency, including energy efficiency, across Council operations.
- Undertake independent benchmarking of Council practices.

## Link to Community Priorities





## Programs: Priority Area 6

# Improve resource recovery facilities and services

Council provides kerbside rubbish and recycling collection, public litter bin collection and public waste management facilities at Castlemaine and Maldon.

As a core Council service, it is vital to continually innovate and improve the delivery of waste and resource recovery within the Shire. To this end Council continues to examine its waste operations and research new and improved approaches, for example waste to energy opportunities.

Improving waste management will require the community to generate less waste and Council to increase its diversion of waste from landfill, including green organic waste.

Council has the capacity to influence community behaviour regarding waste through education and compliance.

Reducing the impact of waste will include rehabilitating old landfill sites as public open space and reducing greenhouse gas emissions from current waste management facilities.

### Long-Term Goal

Towards zero waste.

### Intermediate Outcome

**Council runs a range of programs and services to reduce waste to landfill, including the separation and diversion of organic waste.**

### Evaluation Question

To what extent have Council programs and services reduced waste to landfill, including the separation and diversion of waste?

### Key Strategic Tasks

- Develop and implement a new Waste and Resource Recovery Management Plan.
- Implement the Castlemaine Waste Management Facility Master Plan.
- Maximise the diversion of waste from landfill, including organic waste.

### Link to Community Priorities



# Protect natural environment assets

Natural environment assets are places recognised as having environmental or intrinsic community value at a national, state, regional or local community level.

In our municipality a range of natural environment assets exist. These include waterways, habitat for indigenous species, rare or threatened vegetation types and high quality remnant vegetation patches. Scattered or degraded environment assets, such as trees that occur in paddocks or on roadsides, or sites that are locally significant and can be rehabilitated, also make a significant contribution to the overall environmental value of the municipality. These assets provide a range of 'ecosystem services' such as clean air and water, climate regulation and public open space.

Council manages a diverse land portfolio. To improve the condition of priority natural environment assets, Council must make the best use of available resources. Council will lead an asset-based priority setting process incorporating community input.

On private land, Council will protect natural environment assets through targeted amendments to the planning scheme. Using its rates, compliance, and education functions, Council will assist landholders through a land stewardship program.

In addition, Council will collaborate with the many external organisations and community groups doing great work to increase the extent and connectivity of natural environment assets across the municipality.

## Long-Term Goal

The natural environment is healthy and thriving.

## Intermediate Outcome

**Priority natural environment assets are protected and are improving in ecological condition.**

## Evaluation Question

What evidence is there that prioritised natural environment assets are being protected and have improved?

## Key Strategic Tasks

- Develop and implement a Public Open Space Strategy.
- Implement the Roadside Conservation Management Plan.
- Implement recommendations from the Rural Land Study.
- Develop and implement site specific environmental management plans for priority assets.
- Review and amend the planning scheme.

## Link to Community Priorities



## Programs: Priority Area 8

# Integrate our response to climate change

Climate change in our region is expected to increase temperatures, resulting in more hot days and fire-weather, fewer frosts, less rain in the cooler months but more intense rainfall events when they do occur. Adapting to these changes and reducing further impacts, will require Council's thoughtful consideration.

As weather extremes will affect some people more than others, Council will provide targeted support to assist those in our community that are most vulnerable. Council will also continue its emergency management role, including support for community-based emergency preparations. Other community-based adaptation measures, such as community food gardens, will be supported.

Council has a role to play in mitigating climate change by reducing its carbon emissions. Council will actively transition to 100 percent renewable energy across its operations and will support community-based efforts to transition to renewable energy in a way that is sensitive to heritage and other community values.

Council will actively seek solutions that minimise emissions from its landfill and fleet and lead the transition to a low carbon economy.

### Long-Term Goal

Council is carbon neutral and is resilient to the impacts of climate change.

### Intermediate Outcome

**Council has integrated consideration of climate change into all operations and actively influences and advocates about adaptation and mitigation more broadly.**

### Evaluation Question

To what extent has Council integrated climate change across its operations and actively influenced and advocated to the community and others?

### Key Strategic Tasks

- Implement the Regional Climate Adaptation Plan.
- Develop and implement the Climate Change Action Plan.
- Through relevant planning manage and minimise the impacts on Council and the community from heatwaves, fires, floods and other extreme weather events.

### Link to Community Priorities





Cover - Scarlet Robin: Damian Kelly 2011  
p.3 - Yellow Gum: Bronwyn Silver  
p.4 - Caper White Butterfly: Bernard Slattery 2011  
p.8 - Slender Dodder-laurel with Moss: Bronwyn Silver  
p.11 - Liverwort and Moss: Bronwyn Silver  
p.11 - Lady on Balcony: The Hub Foundation  
p20. - Bike Parking: The Hub Foundation, 2014