

6.5 Activity Reports

6.5.1 Environment Quarterly Report

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Recommendation(s)

That Council note this report.

Attachments

1. Environment quarterly report - February 2021 [6.5.1.1 - 6 pages]

Executive Summary

This report provides a summary of some key projects, services and actions delivering environmental benefits across the work of Council. Projects have been categorised according to the Sustainable Environment Policy (SEP) 2018–28 themes of:

- Biodiversity
- Climate change
- Water
- Waste and resource recovery

The SEP is the roadmap for the future direction of Council's environmental and sustainability strategies, plans and activities.

A similar report will be presented each quarter highlighting new programs or projects that have achieved significant milestones.

Background

There are a broad range of projects, services and actions delivering environmental benefits throughout the organisation. While many of these occur within or are led by the Infrastructure and Environment division, the majority of the organisation is involved in environmental sustainability to some degree. Below is a highlight of some of the key projects currently being undertaken.

All actions fall within the Council Plan 2020–21 under the key performance area of Our Environment 'we will continue to plan and manage the natural and built environment for present and future generations'.

Biodiversity

Council Plan action – Protect and improve biodiversity by increasing the area of natural ecosystems across the Shire.

Council Plan action – Preserve and improve our bushland and natural environment by implementing weed management strategy and programs and continuing activities on high conservation bushland reserves and roadsides.

Community participation opportunities

Description	<p>In 2021, Council has some exciting community participation opportunities, these include an indigenous plant giveaway (through the new nursery at Deep Creek Reserve) and online gardens for wildlife workshops.</p> <p>Trial plant giveaway – residents can attend the nursery with their rates notice or driver’s license and pick two free indigenous plants.</p> <p>Online gardens for wildlife workshops – run by Sustainable Gardening Australia and will cover garden design using indigenous plants and how to attract birds, butterflies, bees, lizards, mammals and frogs to your backyard.</p>
Funding	These initiatives are fully funded by Council
Update	<p>Trial plant giveaway The Deep Creek Nursery is scheduled to open in April 2021 and to help encourage residents to use the nursery and understand the benefits of indigenous plants, Council will be offering an indigenous plant giveaway. The trial giveaway is limited to the first 2000 people who take up the offer. One of the plants must be a woody stem (small to large tree) to assist with carbon uptake as outlined in Councils Aspirational Energy Transition Plan.</p> <p>The trial indigenous plant giveaway will run April-June 2021.</p> <p>Online Gardens for Wildlife Council has lots of great information about making a ‘garden for wildlife, on our website, however due to COVID-19 restrictions site visits by volunteer community garden guides are currently suspended. Council has adapted its gardens for wildlife program to allow it to continue regardless of restrictions and in 2021, will run online workshops during February and March.</p> <p>The following online workshops are proposed. Each workshop is linked to a factsheet available on Council’s website:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your garden for wildlife - garden design, preparation and maintenance • Beautiful birds – attracting small birds to your garden • Beautiful butterflies and native bees – creating an insect friendly garden • Lovely lizards – creating a lizard, skink and gecko friendly garden • Furry friends – creating a native mammal friendly garden • Fabulous frogs - creating a frog pond <p>Residents who participate in one of the online workshops are eligible for \$20 of free plants to help create their wildlife garden.</p>

Friends groups return to bushland reserves

Description	Friends groups returning to their bushland reserves post COVID-19 restrictions
Funding	Friends groups are volunteer groups that are supported by Council
Update	<p>Friends groups are now returning to their bushland reserves for their regular working bees, following the long break during COVID-19 restrictions. Groups have been submitting their requests for approval to Council's Pandemic Response Team to ensure they have all of the necessary information and plans in place to work CovidSafe.</p> <p>It has been a challenging year for our friends' groups who have not been able to maintain their regular activities at respective bushland reserves. Council staff will be on hand to assist the groups with their annual activities such as weed control, mulching and preparation of planting beds and revegetation projects.</p>

Climate change

Council Plan action - Adapt to the impacts of climate change by working in partnership with the South East Councils Climate Change Alliance (SECCCA) and both Victorian and Australian Governments

Council Plan action – Reduce Council's energy consumption and help the community to do likewise.

Fleet carbon offset

Description	Council has offset 733 tonnes of fleet related carbon emissions by supporting native forest reforestation projects
Funding	This project is fully funded by Council
Update	<p>The purchase of fleet carbon offsets is a practical option for offsetting unavoidable organisational emissions. The combined annual emissions of Council's vehicles is approximately 1300 tonnes. Council has partnered with GreenFleet to offset a portion of its vehicle related carbon emissions. Around 730 tonnes of fleet related carbon dioxide emissions have been offset through the partnership this financial year.</p> <p>GreenFleet are actively working to restore native forests around Australia. These reforestation projects rejuvenate crucial habitat for endangered wildlife, help to counter the adverse effects of bushfires and reduce the impacts of climate change by sequestering carbon dioxide. The planting of native trees and shrubs for their specific carbon sequestration capacity promotes the establishment of habitat stepping-stones and links for biodiversity to move and disperse back through the landscape. Promoting the resilience of native biodiversity and ecosystems to climate change.</p>

Asset vulnerability assessment

Description	Council is participating in a regional asset vulnerability assessment through its membership in South East Councils Climate Change Alliance (SECCCA). The assessment will evaluate the vulnerability of Council's drainage, roads, and buildings assets to the adverse effects of climate change. This assessment will consider the vulnerability of these council asset classes to floods, bushfires, heat, and sea level rise.
Funding	This project is funded through SECCCA with contribution from Council's insurance provider.
Update	<p>The project is being undertaken by Spatial Vision; a Melbourne based GIS data consultancy with extensive experience in undertaking asset-based vulnerability assessments. Council specific asset data from the various SECCCA member councils is being collecting and compiled for verification and standardisation.</p> <p>Spatial Vision are completing the process of collecting individual council asset data and have completed a workshop with the project working group. The project working group consists of asset managers from the participating SECCCA councils. The workshop enabled Spatial Vision the opportunity to consult with council asset managers to identify key climate change and extreme weather events of concern to each participating council. Council representatives from the Assets Management team are participating in the project working group and the Environment team is involved as a member of the project steering committee.</p> <p>The project outcomes will include a report with case study examples of vulnerability of specific asset types across the SECCCA region, as well as a spatial data toolkit. Capacity building will be offered to asset managers of all councils in the use of the visualisation tool. Asset managers will be able to utilise the tool to identify the vulnerability of council assets to different climate impacts and scenarios. This report and visualisation tool are aimed at providing asset managers with the data and information needed to inform decisions in order to develop climate smart assets and maintenance plans. The project is set for completion by mid-2021.</p>

Water

Council Plan action – Manage water in an integrated way, including the reduction of potable water consumption by Council and households.

Council plan action - Promote water catchment management practices that improve the quality of our waterways

Gembrook Park stormwater works

Description	Improvement to stormwater flow into Gembrook Park included replacing the small stormwater pits on Redwood Road with much larger pits, construction of a retention basin to slows the flow of water.
Funding	This project was jointly funded by Council and Melbourne Water's Living Rivers program
Update	<p>The final component of drainage upgrade works to protect Gembrook Park have been completed. Historically, stormwater has run through the park at a high-speed, spreading road-gravel and weeds through the gully. This has waterlogged and destabilised large trees and smothered the native vegetation below.</p> <p>The larger stormwater pits installed on Redwood Road capture a greater amount of water, especially in periods of heavy rain, and the larger drainage pipes under the road now flow into the new retention basin. The retention basin slows the flow of water, reducing the erosion damage in the park and captures gravel and leaf litter.</p> <p>An interpretation sign for the retention basin has recently been installed, informing the community of the works and reason for the construction of the retention basin.</p> <p>Thank you to the Friends of Gembrook Park for their ongoing work to protect this precious environment.</p>

Waste and resource recovery

Council Plan action – promote practices that result in the reduction per household of the amount of waste going to landfill, particularly food waste.

“Do the right thing” Waste education videos

Description	<p>In October 2020, Council’s new kerbside collection contract with waste provider Cleanaway started and included the rollout of 16 new waste trucks, with new educational signage.</p> <p>COVID-19 restrictions impacted on face-to-face events in 2020 resulting in new ways of engaging with our community needing to be developed. Three new videos have been created to inform the community of the improvements to our waste collection (including food waste in green bin) and invoke residents to <i>do the right thing, use the right bin!</i></p>
Funding	This initiative is fully fund by Council, through the annual garbage charge.
Update	<p>To encourage community members to “<i>Do the right thing, use the right bin</i>” (a message feature on several of the new waste collection trucks) Council has developed multiple video’s highlighting this message and supporting broader waste education.</p> <p>The videos focus on the importance of correct recycling at home, benefits of the food and green waste recovery service and the new and improved trucks which feature state of the art technology improving efficiency, safety, and contamination reduction.</p> <p>The videos all feature local families, encouraging residents to take responsibility in the role they play within the waste system and “<i>Do the right thing, use the right bin</i>”.</p> <p>The videos will continue to be featured on Council’s social media channels and website, which has already had strong engagement from the community.</p>

Deep Creek Reserve – compost garden

Description	<p>Deep Creek Reserve's compost corner is a working display, designed to educate the community about food waste and help reduce the amount of food waste going to landfill. The area features a range of worm farms and compost bins suitable for home use. Compost corner links in with our existing compost rebate program and workshops aiming to reduce household waste.</p>
Funding	This project is fully funded by Council.
Update	<p>The compost systems and worm farms were installed in early 2020 but the project was put on hold during Covid-19 restrictions. Work on site to complete the project was able to occur in December 2020. An engaging space with displays, signage and information about food waste was developed which highlights the benefits of home composting and worm farms. This area will be used for planned education and engagement workshops through EcoLink and Council, as well as creating a learning environment for those passing by.</p> <p>The compost corner includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • composting systems which will be used by the deep creek café for food scraps • a herb garden for the cafe to use, demonstrating the circular economy • informative signage about food waste and benefits of composting • a paved pathway encouraging residents to walk through and explore the area • native plants in keeping with the rest of Deep Creek Reserve’s landscape.

Contamination education – bin inspections

Description	The bin inspection program aims to reduce contamination in kerbside recycling and green waste bins by inspecting presented bins and providing individual feedback to residents. Positive reinforcement is used to encourage and reward those who are already doing an excellent job. Educational resources are provided to those households with incorrect items which are contaminating our recovery streams.
Funding	This initiative is fully fund by Council, through the annual garbage charge
Update	<p>Changes are underway to further improve this program with the development of new educational material, redesigning existing material such as stickers, flyers and letters which include more images and diagrams for simple but clear messages that can be better understood by all members of the community. As well as a detailed awareness campaign.</p> <p>Contamination not only has a negative environmental impact due to increasing the potential of recoverable material ending up in landfill, but there are also increased costs associated with processing contaminated material. Contamination can also cause significant OH&S risks to staff and cause damage to expensive sorting equipment and waste collection trucks.</p> <p>It's important that Council continue working with the community to reduce contamination. Some of the common mistakes made by our community include:</p> <p>Recycling contamination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • plastic bags and soft plastics (wrappers) • Clothing and textiles • garden and food waste • nappies <p>Green bin contamination:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • plastic bags • household rubbish • textiles • kitty litter and animal poo • treated timber and gardening equipment