

Sustainable Environment Advisory Committee MINUTES



Thursday 2nd February 2023

Chairperson

Cr Johanna Skelton

Members present

Cr Andrew Fullager, Jess Rae (YRC), Amanda Smith (YRC), Suzanne Burville (YRC), Sarah Bond, (YRC), Joanna Lebbink (YRC), Graeme George (member), Lauren Dwyer (member), Laurence Gaffney (member), Melanie Birtchnell (member), Peter Martin (member), Lucy Gilchrist (member), Mel Carmody (Melbourne Water), Merryn Kelly (DEECA)

Apologies

Cr Tim Heenan, Graham Brew (YRC), Kym Saunders (YRC), Tom Meek (YRC), Clinton Muller (member), Ron Sawyer (member), Joanne Antrobus (Parks Vic), Jeff Barlow (member), Lucy Southwell-Hambly (member), Jonathan Gay (member), Bec Brannigan (member), Darren Wandin (member),

Confirmation of minutes of meeting held on 1st December 2022

Moved: Graeme George

Seconded: Melanie Birtchnell

Declaration of interest

None

Outstanding Actions		
ACTION	Schedule Biodiversity subcommittee meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Draft Nature Plan <i>A formal sub committee meeting to discuss potential changes to the Nature Plan to be scheduled.</i>Dixons Creek – Cultural Burn <i>On-site meeting if possible (check with Darren and Brett). Assess interest in creating a working group for this topic to look at process, policy and recommendations.</i> <i>Pending</i>	Amanda Smith
ACTION	Progress data set from DELWP (now DEECA) and discuss as subcommittee Biodiversity working group <i>Pending</i>	Amanda Smith
ACTION	Schedule Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act presentation (potentially a joint presentation by DELWP (now DEECA) on policy and YRC on how it affects council).	Amanda Smith

New Actions		
ACTION	Provide location details of Wonga Vine removal at Cardigan Road. <i>Completed. Map is located with meeting files.</i>	Melissa Carmody

ACTION	Arrange for a representative from the State Gov offset team to present at SEAC &/or the Biodiversity Subcommittee.	Suzanne Burville / Merryn Kelly
ACTION	Consult IT about providing additional laptops for next meeting. <i>Completed. IT are working on a hybrid solution for the rooms we use for the meetings but it may not be ready for the April meeting.</i>	Suzanne Burville
ACTION	Circulate answers to BOP questions made prior to meeting.	Joanna Lebbink
ACTION	Check biochar and carbon drawdown references in the Sustainability Report 2021 and Council website.	Jessica Rae/Suzanne Burville
ACTION	Consider including the Firestick program as a future topic.	Jessica Rae

1. Agency Updates

Melissa Carmody (Melbourne Water), Merryn Kelly (DEECA)

Melbourne Water

- Storm recovery works at Silvan Reservoir have commenced
- Deer culling at Silvan continues with 11 deer remaining
- Liveable communities/liveable waterways revised funding happening where practical after several projects were damaged
- Met with Kallista Flood Watch Group to encourage residents to apply for funding along the Sassafras Creek corridor
- Domaine Chandon billabongs scoping continues
- Treatment of weedy Wonga Vine and other weeds has commenced in the Cardigan Rd Retarding Basin

Department Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA)

Liwik Barring Landscape Conservation Area update

- Decline in survey site visits due to wet weather access issues and the holiday season
- Weed control continues and will be partnering with Narrap Team to deliver the next round.

ACTION	Provide location details of Wonga Vine removal at Cardigan Road	Melissa Carmody
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2. Biodiversity Offset Program Review - Joanna Lebbink

- Policy and legislation
- What is a biodiversity offset?
- Timeline
- How it works
- Current offset sites
- Program goals
- Offsets within the Yarra Ranges
- Future options

Comments/feedback

- Council program generally quicker and more certainty of pricing (with fixed price).

- Is there option to generate offsets through the BioLinks program? – being strategic and linking to projects that are planned can be an option.
- Surprised to see the proportion of offsets represented in YR by CMA, that under-represented EVCs are not being protected. Good constituent relationship building with ratepayers that YRC has its own program, offering local offsets for local gains. Differing veg communities remains problematic, the like-for-like issue from previous legislation. Has issue with existing council owned land being covenanted, more private land acquisition or brokering? Look at broader gains that could be made in habitat improvements for threatened species (ticking box for general gains but also possibly species-specific gains). Is there enough agility in the program surplus to purchase property to add to the program. Fully behind council being in the space of offsets, 95% of conviction is around supporting genuine small planning applications, drives better outcomes for small developments and ensures greater compliance with the planning system.

Joanna Lebbink: The reveg sites are not yet resilient enough to walk away from (i.e. Healesville). Would need to reinvest in private land acquisition. First step is determining that the program should continue. The good intent is there, the commitment has been made to those sites long-term.

- Agree with council’s role in offsetting, wondered about maintenance but been covered by Jo. Not sure of the gain in reality of securing covenants on existing council owned land.
- It’s advantageous that council have control of the offset sites. Targeted property acquisition to build on corridors or add to existing reserves would be an ideal outcome. Can the program profit be used to reinvest.
- Not such a fan of offset programs generally but noted the Auditor General’s comments complimenting this program. VAGO suggested pretty good in area of controlling avoidance and minimisation has taken place, prior to offsets, would like to see the Guidelines.
- There hasn’t been any increased resourcing from DEECA to LG for implementing their policy. LG has been forced to try and resource. It’s a credit to the program that it’s endured multiple changes to native vegetation policy over the life of the program.

Merryn Kelly (DEECA): Office of Conservation Regulator, still finding their feet and looking at illegal activity or large-scale clearance.

ACTION	Arrange for a representative from the State Gov offset team to present at SEAC &/or the Biodiversity Subcommittee.	Suzanne Burville / Merryn Kelly
ACTION	Circulate answers to BOP questions made prior to meeting.	Joanna Lebbink

3. Energy Transition Plan – Sarah Bond

- What is an energy transition?
- The journey so far
- Understanding our (councils) emissions
- What is meant by net zero?
- Achieving net zero by 2040
- Carbon sequestration
- What have other councils done?
- Journey to net zero

Comments/questions/feedback

Q. How does Biochar create offsets and how different is it from compost?

A. Biochar can be used in the creation of roads etc resulting in trapped carbon.

Q. Why isn’t waste included in the emissions?

A. Those emissions are created by community, not council. Council 'own's the emissions of the trucks that transport the rubbish.

Q. Any information about what might happen with soft plastics now Redcycle has ceased collection?

A. State Government are looking into a soft plastics collection.

Comment. There are misleading and incorrect statements about biochar and carbon drawdown in the Sustainability Report 2021 and Council website.

ACTION	Check biochar and carbon drawdown references in the Sustainability Report 2021 and Council website.	
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4. Open Floor

Q. Has there been any progress in improving hybrid meetings? i.e the use of different tech such as the Owl Labs device? (<https://owllabs.au/>)

A. IT were consulted on the Owl Labs device and permission to use it was denied. Other rooms have similar issues when it comes to hybrid - there isn't a perfect solution at this time. We can request additional laptops be made available for those attending in person.

Q. Can Council present its Firestick program to SEAC?

ACTION	Consult IT about providing additional laptops for next meeting	Suzanne Burville
ACTION	Consider including the Firestick program as a future topic	Jessica Rae

Meeting closed

7.53pm

Next meeting

Thursday 6th April 5.30pm

Deferred topics

Urban Tree Canopy Strategy update

Amendment C148 – Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme

Revised Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act