

Sustainable Environment Advisory Committee MINUTES



Thursday 1st December 2022

Chairperson

Cr Johanna Skelton

Members present

Jess Rae (YRC), Amanda Smith (YRC), Sarah Bond (YRC), Tom Meek (YRC), Graeme George (member), Ron Sawyer (member), Laurence Gaffney (member), Bec Brannigan (member), Lauren Dwyer (member), Peter Martin (member), Lucy Gilchrist (member), Melanie Birtchnell (member), Mel Carmody (Melbourne Water),

Apologies

Cr Andrew Fullagar, Julia Kelley (YRC), Suzanne Burville (YRC), Kym Saunders (YRC), Graham Brew (YRC), Jeff Barlow (member), Jonathan Gay (member), Clinton Muller (member), Lucy Southwell-Hambly (member), Joanne Antrobus (Parks Vic), Merryn Kelly (DELWP), Darren Wandin (member)

Confirmation of minutes of meeting held on 6th October 2022

Moved: Laurence

Seconded: Graeme

Declaration of interest

None

Outstanding Actions		
ACTION	Dixon's Creek site ecology discussion - Graeme George, Darren Wandin and Brett Ellis. <i>Deferred to Biodiversity sub-committee</i>	Darren Wandin
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>	Amanda Smith
ACTION	Progress data set from DELWP and discuss as subcommittee Biodiversity working group. <i>Pending</i>	Amanda Smith

New Actions		
ACTION	Send Great Forest National Park Report to members	Amanda
ACTION	Schedule Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act presentation (potentially a joint presentation by DELWP on policy and YRC on how it affects council).	Jess / Amanda

1. Agency Updates

Melissa Carmody (Melbourne Water)

Melbourne Water

- Busy with flood recovery and assessing private property. Significant impacts and those on existing grant programs have had assistance offered, likewise with council grant program.
- Silvan storm recovery, working with VicForest doing the clean-up.
- Burrowing Crayfish monitoring.
- Deer control in Silvan - culled 11 of the 23 identified in survey work.
- Spadonis Billabong, have undertaken vegetation monitoring of the area that has been reinstated during 2016.

2. Looking Back

- **Peter:** appreciates the group expertise, members and council staff alike. Concerns about potential for committee's great ideas to be implemented – ties to funding or lack thereof. How can the committee be more effective?
- **Lucy:** First year, interesting to hear from other members and particularly long serving members with significant expertise. Time it takes for things to progress has been a surprise.
- **Bec:** Overwhelming the expertise in the group and keen for more content on the sustainability side of the committee.
- **Melanie:** Sometimes frustrated, but mostly happy and grateful to be part of the group and able to contribute. Frustrated by the processes that had to be followed for the Warburton MTB project, that resulted in a project being approved that was the one recommended by the committee. Particular thanks to the staff of council who give their time and effort to this committee regularly, particularly Amanda on the Biodiversity Plan this year.
- **Lauren:** enjoyed the process of being part of the Biodiversity Plan and looks forward to next edit. Reflected on the committee and how hard it is to be new to it, encouraging the newer members.
- **Ron:** great staff at YRC who are well versed in their work and thinks SEAC is a great resource. Their contributions and knowledge is fantastic. Perhaps went into too much detail on some topics which has bumped others out. Several councillors who seem really focussed on environment which is great locally. Topics such as regenerative agriculture hasn't had any time and he'd like it to be on the agenda in 2023.
- **Graeme:** found online meetings difficult and prefers face to face, look forward to seeing the whole committee back together. 4th term over 10 years, along with Melanie and Laurence. Hang in there newcomers, it gets easier and better! Frustration has been expressed this year about contributions to the Nature Plan not being incorporated and look forward to next discussion on that.
- **Laurence:** disappointed that most of the submission on the Nature Plan wasn't incorporated into the draft and doubts that it will be substantially changed, as that would likely require re-consultation on the final. Thinks that the Warburton MTB project should have a lot of project learnings for council and an example of how the committee has important input. Interested in hearing about FFG Act changes and impact to the work of council. It would be good to understand the politics of the organisation more thoroughly, to know how the committee can be effective in their submissions and recommendations and the likelihood of them being considered and/or implemented.

3. Looking Forward

- More reading material ahead of time, including of the presentations. Having sufficient information ahead to ask intelligent questions of the presenter and have more thorough dialogue. SEAC needs to have another look at the Great Forest National Park proposal and have the report.
- Cultural burning across the landscapes, looking at pest plant ecology and how weeds might be treated and identified in differing ways across the municipality. Also Great Forest National Park.
- Little in the way of metrics of how things are progressing. Interested in measure of canopy cover at the shire level. We have a lot of strategies; Ribbons of Green can go and plant 65,000 plants p/a but believes we're still going backwards at the shire level. Conscious of not creating a lot of additional work but can there be efficient ways to utilise data that is already being captured and can the committee help with these.
- See us as an advisory committee, so feels it's appropriate for council to bring what they need support on. Particularly interested in monitoring programs on bushland reserves and the metrics for the Nature Plan. Hybrid meetings – how can the technology support better? At Banyule CC, they utilise a device called an Owl and can pick up whoever is talking and camera moved to face the person talking and is transportable.
- Interested in all things biodiversity, and indigenous cultural heritage and the intersection of the two. Fire ecology, regenerative agriculture and how we plan for the future in modified landscapes. It's great to have people with different areas of speciality looking at other topics, as it allows lateral thinking. Rather than a briefing style, would prefer the seeking of advice to leverage fullest potential – using it as a think tank. The interrogation of ideas is most interesting to me. In the next year, would like to know how to build better relationships with other councillors who are not involved and also staff in other areas. How can we demonstrate the good will and resource of the committee that all of council can leverage? Can be effective change-makers, not a lobby group.
- Agree with others, would also like to see more topics like circular economy, repair economy, sustainability focus generally.
- Interested to broaden understanding of areas outside interest/focus (biodiversity) such as sustainability. Also, the accessibility of sub-committee meetings (time of day) and allowing hybrid ongoing as it suits better.
- Agreement with Mel B on the idea of a think tank. Making the committee relevant to the council work. The current alignment of councillors with committees that they want to be involved with, means that no cross-pollination of ideas can occur. Can the debates be improved with the sharing of info between committees? Ron's point about metrics is important. Biolinks project is of significant interest, there is consulting work that Cardinia Shire had to pay for. Peter has colleagues in his industry who can do much of this work as volunteers. Can we use volunteers more? Have specialist knowledge of volunteers to contribute, as well as those interested in physical work.
- I was keen to raise the purpose of the SEAC and ensuring council make the best use out of the committee, not just as an 'for update' forum

ACTION

Send Great Forest National Park Report to members

4. Council's Key Priorities 2022-23

Nature Plan Finalisation

Over the 8-week consultation period for the Draft Nature Plan, we heard from a broad cross-section of our community. Our Shaping Yarra Ranges page was visited 1,506 times and our draft plan was downloaded 645 times, an impressive reflection on the interest in this topic! There were 71 contributions to the Shaping Yarra Ranges page, with an additional 47 contributions at the various in person engagement events that we attended. These included Belgrave Platypus Festival, Wandin-Silvan Field Day, Kilsyth Festival and a suite of pop-ups across the shire.

Our advisory committees were all re-visited and once again provided insightful and considered feedback. Our comms campaign reached well over 2,500 residents across various networks including Environment groups, Early years and education networks, Township groups, agribusiness networks and youth channels to name a few. Key themes of feedback included support for incentive programs, action on deer, interactions between climate and biodiversity loss, funding of programs, education programs for community and much more. We look forward to consolidating this feedback and bringing a final strategy to Council in the new year.

Action: Biodiversity sub-committee to meet in the new year to discuss amendments to the Nature Plan ahead of finalising (Amanda)

Circular economy/Waste team transition

Rollout first stage is the FOGO, weekly collection. Container disposal scheme for end of 2023. Glass service from 2025/26, but may be brought forward. Change of the bin lid colours for consistency across the state. Glass recycling challenges with value proposition for Yarra Ranges municipality size. Advanced waste processing facilities with landfills closing. Joined with other councils in eastern region to deal with waste – waste to energy plant.

Committee interested in what will happen with the soft plastics component, given the recent Redcycle announcement.

Question: Are we in talks with Eenee nappies for composting? They deal with a number of councils already. (https://www.eenee.com/contents/en-us/d52_commercial_composting_nappies.html) [See response >](#)

Integrated Water Management

Re-write of the IWMP and will bring the revised strategy to SEAC early on. Water efficiency, stormwater harvesting, wastewater, education and grant funding, catchment priority. A stormwater plan is being written by the Stormwater Team and this plan will form part of the over-arching IWMP.

Question: Has any follow up been done on the pharmaceutical inputs into waterways? Also, the septic leaking into the systems.

Answer: We did a follow up study with Monash on the septic leaking, trialling the Smart Tank systems in the Monbulk catchment to return water into the natural system in a more natural regime.

Comment: The 4 sewerage treatment plants of Melbourne that return water into the Yarra catchment do not filter for pharmaceuticals, so not just septic systems.

ACTION	Schedule Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act presentation (potentially a joint presentation by DELWP on policy and YRC on how it affects council).	
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Meeting closed

7.45pm

Next meeting

Thursday 2nd February 5.30pm

Deferred topics

Urban Tree Canopy Strategy update

Amendment C148 – Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme

Revised Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act