

COUNCIL PRIORITY & COMMUNITY CONCERNS 4



Have your say at the community consultation round table.



The Envirometer

While councils are implementing a wide range of environment programs there is scope for these programs to be shaped to further engage the community.

CASE STUDY

Sustainability Streets Ahead!

Sustainability Street is an exciting new community and sustainability capacity building initiative that is currently being implemented in 10 Victorian councils.

Offered by Environs Australia and Vox Bandicoot, Sustainability Street enables local communities to create healthier, safer and more environmentally friendly places in which to live. Participants are provided with the skills and knowledge to transform their own living practices and their local area into the most sustainable living environment possible, while developing local networks and a sense of community. Vox Bandicoot works with each 'Sustainability Street' over 6 months through a four-phase program.

Sustainability Street works on two critical principles. First, that both community and ecological sustainability are the primary drivers of improved on-ground sustainability practices. Second, that utilising participatory planning and community engagement processes result in communities that are not only more capable of engaging in sustainable living practices but create stronger, more resilient and

Contributing to sustainability is everybody's responsibility.

This chapter considers the relationship between councils and the community in our journey towards sustainability. Community concern and activism around the environment and sustainability will influence a council's priorities and efforts in this area. Environmental leadership and delivery of appropriate programs by a local council can be a powerful way of further increasing community awareness and participation.

Pressure

Our behaviour impacts on our environment as the other chapters in this bulletin clearly indicate. Pollution, climate change, waste and litter, the over-consumption of resources and the loss of biodiversity result in growing awareness and concern about environmental issues and that our current way of living is not sustainable.

When individuals and communities begin to act on this concern by making changes in their own lives, participating in environmental groups and activities and by electing environmentally aware candidates and lobbying elected representatives to progress sustainability outcomes, positive environmental outcomes start to occur. These actions also help to build stronger communities and more participatory governance.

networked communities. The upshot is that local communities, when provided with the tools, knowledge and democratised decision-making processes to set their own priorities, are capable of not only developing excellent sustainability practices but promoting them locally through their own networks.

A council's role in Sustainability Street is to be a facilitator of local engagement, of processes that enable community capacity building, of knowledge-sharing and guiding local communities to better accessing council services and resources. More importantly, Sustainability Street takes sustainability and environmental management out of council's environment unit and across council. Officers throughout council promote and support Sustainability Street through their regular activities and through the creation of an internal officers' support network.

For further information on Sustainability Street contact Environs Australia Projects (VIC) (03) 9347 5344, www.environs.org.au

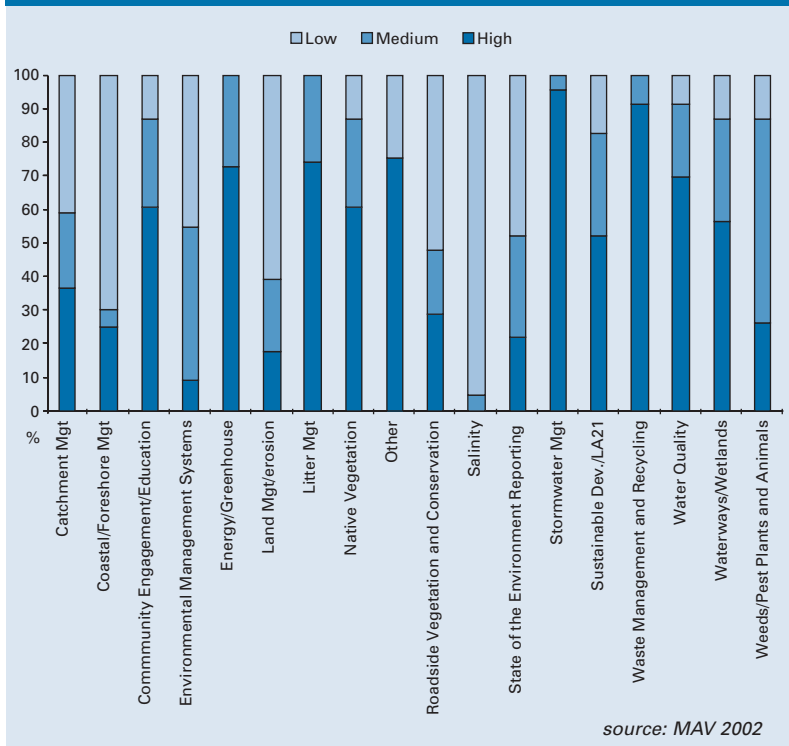
Condition

Environmental management responsibilities are a core business for local government and include: the provision of waste and recycling services, planning controls, environmental protection controls and practices, educational activities, delivery of environmental projects, environmental management systems for council operations and natural resource management. Many councils are also engaging in 'Local Agenda 21' responses that actively engage local communities in defining visions and developing action plans for sustainability (for more information www.ea.gov.au/esd/la21/#overview or www.environs.org.au/cases/).

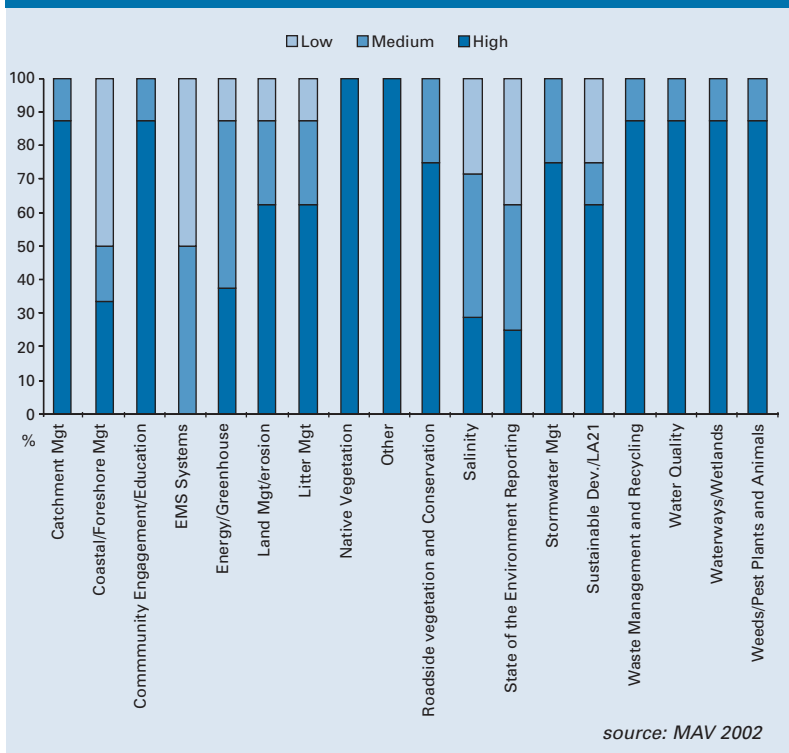
In 2000-01 Australian local government spent a total of \$2.5 billion on measures to protect the environment and a further \$1.8 million on natural resource management. This represents 22% of total Australian local government expenditure.¹ Victorian local government spent an estimated total of \$598.6m in 2000-01 on environmental management.² The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates that only 7% of this expenditure is supported by grants from Commonwealth and State Governments. Council priorities and expenditure vary considerably from one local government area to the next and depend on both the natural resources and challenges within the local environment and the concerns of the community as reflected and represented by the elected council. The ABS estimates that the major expenditure areas for environmental protection in Victoria in 2000-01 were waste management (\$237 million), land management (\$169.8 million) and water management (\$33.4 million).³

In 2002 the Municipal Authority of Victoria (MAV) surveyed local councils and presented results in *2002 Victorian Local Government Environment Management Survey – Programs, Resources and Management Approaches*.⁴ The importance of environmental issues to central, inner and middle Melbourne metropolitan councils is indicated in Graph 1.⁵ Storm water management and waste management and recycling were ranked as high priority by more than 90% of central-middle councils. Energy/greenhouse, litter, water quality and 'other' environmental issues were all rated as high priority by about 70% of councils.⁶ In contrast, 100% of the outer councils, Graph 2, rated native vegetation and 'other' environmental issues as high priority.⁷

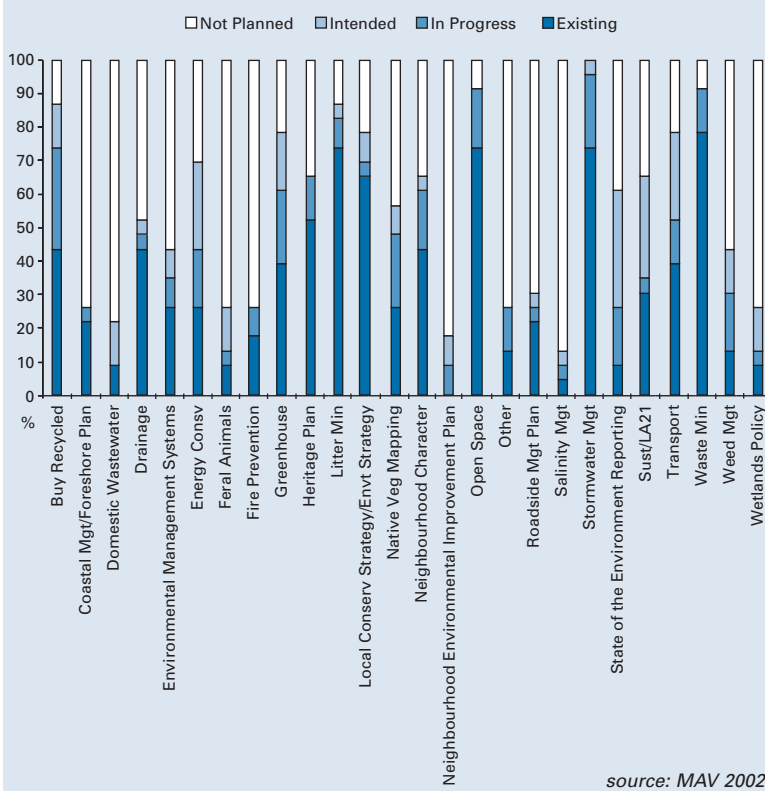
INDICATOR: Graph 1. Council Priority Ratings of Environmental Issues-Central, Inner and Middle Councils



INDICATOR: Graph 2. Council Priority Ratings of Environmental Issues-Outer Metropolitan Councils



INDICATOR: Graph 3. Environmental Strategies-Central, Inner, Middle Metropolitan Councils



Close to 70% or more of outer councils also rated the following issues as high priority: catchment management, community engagement and education, roadside vegetation and conservation, storm water management and water quality.

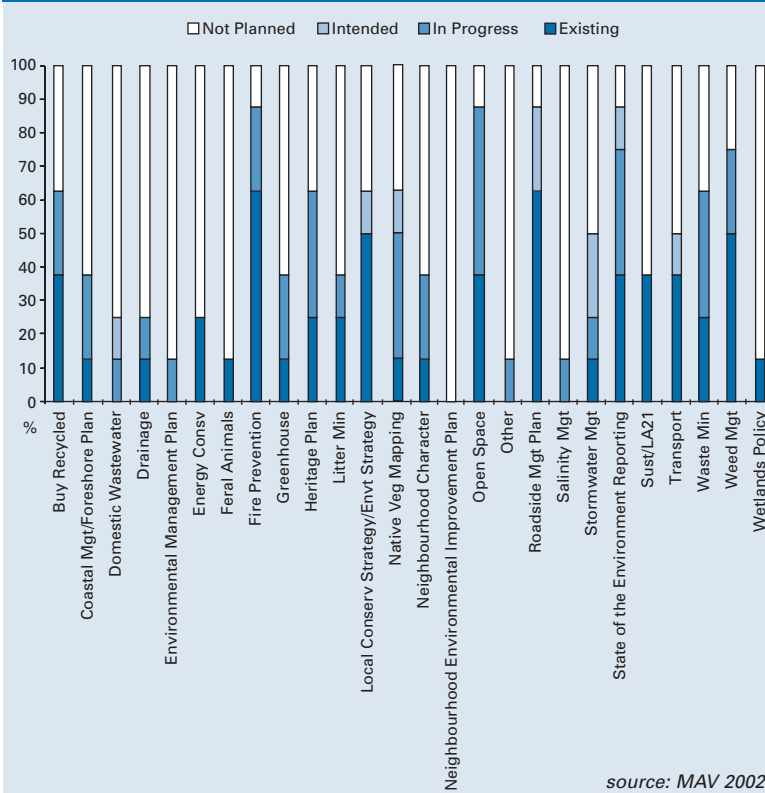
The differing priorities and focus of central-middle metropolitan councils compared to the outer councils is also demonstrated by the percentage of councils that have developed strategies or have strategies under development for different issues (Graphs 3 and 4).

More than 70% of central-middle councils have litter management plans, open space strategies, storm water management plans and waste minimisation strategies. More than 60% of outer councils have fire prevention and roadside management plans with open space, storm water management and weed management strategies also appearing as key priorities when the 'in progress' status is taken into consideration for the outer group. This is likely to reflect the greater amount of bushland in outer councils than in inner-middle council areas.

Written strategies present some of the environmental protection picture, but local governments can be implementing management programs without a policy document or written strategy. Graphs 5 and 6 show vegetation protection and restoration as a major activity of 60% of central-middle councils and all outer councils. The outer councils consistently rank more environmental issues as a high priority or a major management program than central-middle councils, although a higher percentage of central-middle councils are likely to have a strategy implemented or under development.

Council rankings of environmental issues in the 2002 Victorian Local Government Environment Management Survey were allocated by officers representing the council they work for, but to what extent do these priorities reflect community concern? Unfortunately, data that presents community environmental concerns across metropolitan Melbourne councils is not available. Some councils collect this information in varying formats. Some report to their communities on the state of the local environment. The newly created position of Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability, appointed by the State Government, will undertake a public consultation on State of the Environment reporting. In the future, State of the Environment (SoE) reporting may be a legislative requirement for Victorian local governments as it is in New South Wales.

INDICATOR : Graph 4 . Environmental Strategies-Outer Metropolitan Councils



CASE STUDY

Water Conservation

The drought affecting Melbourne has raised community awareness and concern regarding water conservation. Water conservation is also a growing environmental priority for metropolitan councils. This is an example of community concern shaping council priorities which in turn can facilitate further community awareness and action.

Councils are responding to water conservation in a number of ways; by facilitating water sensitive and water wise urban design, establishing water conservation targets and implementation plans for council operations and the municipality, delivering community programs that increase awareness and capacity for water conservation, and providing financial incentives and information to residents regarding water conservation.

The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) launched their Water Campaign for Australian Councils in early 2002. This program establishes a framework for Councils to review and improve the management of freshwater resources by addressing both water quality and water conservation. The program includes setting a water reduction target for council operations and the community and to develop and implement a plan to achieve these reductions. Sixteen Melbourne councils have signed up for the water campaign. For more information www.iclei.org/anz/water/water.htm

The City of Melbourne's Water Use Strategy establishes a goal to use less water in 2020 than the amount used in 1999. This will be a major feat given that the population is

expected to increase from 51 000 to 123 000 residents by 2020 and there will also be growth in the commercial and industrial sectors of the City.

The City of Melbourne's Water Use Strategy was developed with input from the City of Melbourne community and other stakeholders. This final Strategy reflects many of the issues and concerns raised during consultation and in fact, in many instances the bar was raised for goals and targets. Everybody's input is valued so the Strategy will be reviewed every three years and the Action Plans every year; the City of Melbourne encourages continued input and feedback. (ph: 9658 9658)

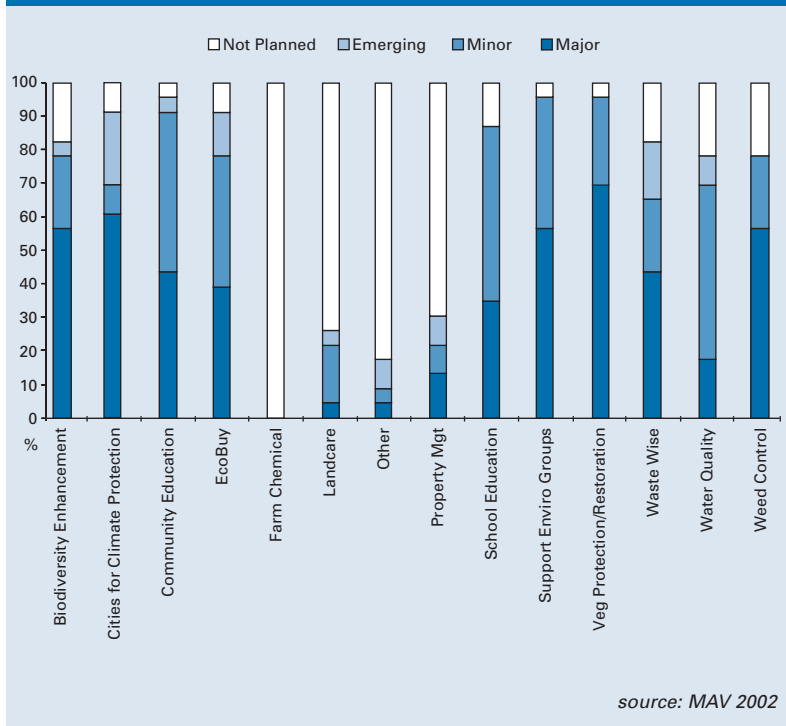
In June 2003, the MAV and Melbourne Water made \$300,000 available for grants of \$10, 000 to metropolitan councils to develop Sustainable Water Use Plans. The plans will provide a straightforward and flexible structure for councils to help conserve water, and to enable councils to lead by example when it comes to promoting water conservation in their communities. The development of Sustainable Water Use Plans will integrate with other local government water management initiatives, such as stormwater and domestic wastewater planning. Councils with existing activities in water conservation will be encouraged to build on these activities in their Sustainable Water Use Plan.

For further information contact Melbourne Water on 9523 7217 or MAV on 9667 5544.

For more information about ways to save water www.savewater.com.au

In the absence of data on the environmental priorities of our communities, we consider here the level to which the community is satisfied with local government performance. Local councils and the State Government have jointly funded and produced annual public opinion polls since 1998. Some local governments take this opportunity to assess community concern of various environmental issues. The introduction of 'Best Value' in December 1999 through an amendment to the *Local Government Act 1989* also requires councils to engage with their communities regarding expectations for service delivery and to monitor and report on performance. Although the Act does not list environmental outcomes as a compulsory requirement of Best Value reporting, councils and communities can make use of the Best Value framework to integrate environmental outcomes and performance.

INDICATOR: Graph 5. Management Programs-Central Inner and Middle Metropolitan Councils



CASE STUDY

Community Accountability Essential at Banyule

Since the original development of the first local Conservation Strategy in Victoria by Heidelberg Council in 1988, community consultation has been an integral part of strategy development in this area.

For Heidelberg's successor, Banyule City Council, it meant the consolidation of the work of special community working groups each concentrating on different sections of the strategy including the natural environment, the built environment, pollution and waste, resource conservation and community education and involvement. This resulted in the production of the Banyule Environment Policy and Strategy in 1997.

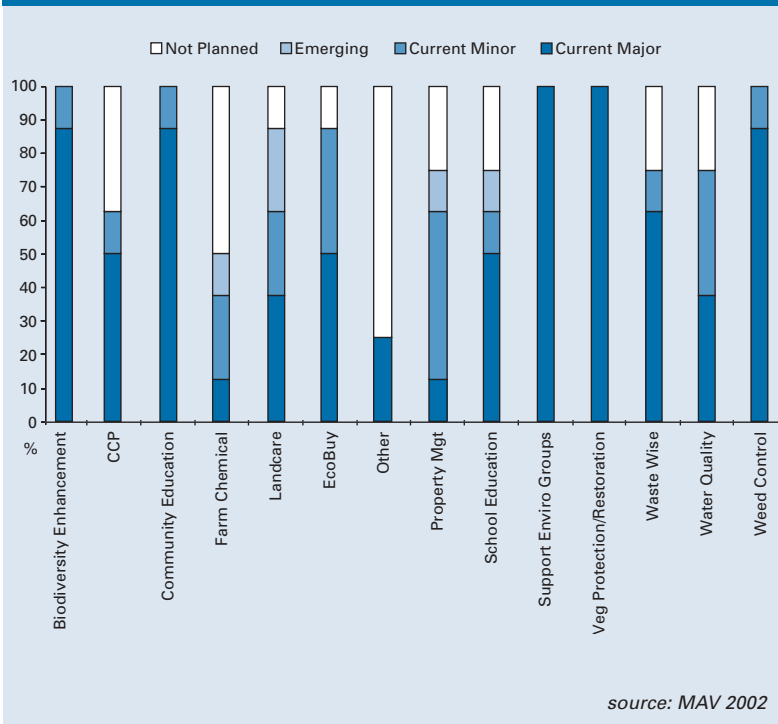
Banyule City Council aimed to increase its accountability to the community and to effectively monitor the implementation of its 1997 strategy, and so developed a State of the Environment Report process. This has meant

annual reporting since 2000 on the progress of implementation of the strategy, action by action.

Progress has been particularly good. The last report in 2002 revealed that 83.7% of actions were progressing well and on time. A further 9.6% had commenced but were progressing slowly, and the remaining 6.6% had not commenced. Such reporting ensures that Council does not shirk its responsibilities or allow important issues to fade into obscurity. It also keeps the community informed, vigilant and involved. The feeling of progress permeates the community and encourages greater efforts across a steadily broader cross section of that community. Along with this reporting, a series of community forums have been held each year to enable the community to provide feedback on the State of the Environment report.

For more information contact the Environmental Officer, Banyule City Council (03) 9457 9834

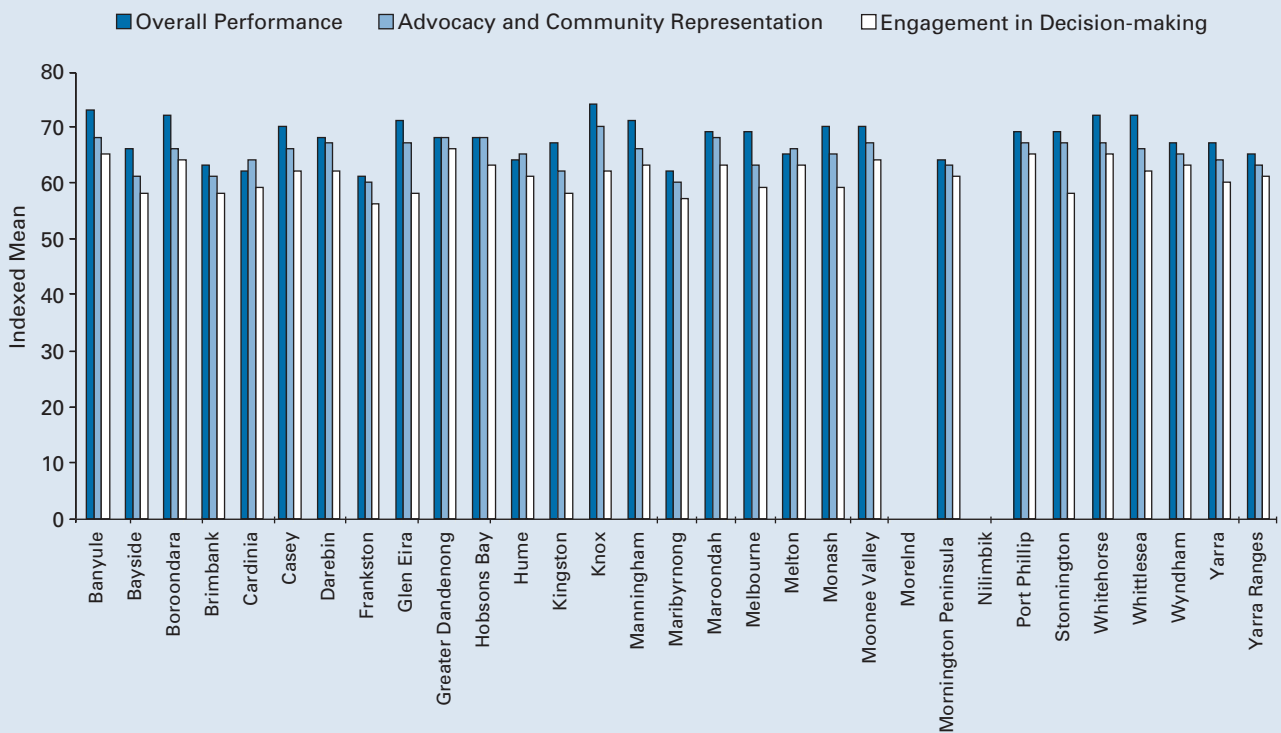
INDICATOR: Graph 6. Management Program Status – Outer Metropolitan Councils



The Department for Victorian Communities' *Local Government Victoria 2002* report draws on indicators published in each councils' Annual Report to present data on local government performance and community satisfaction ratings.⁸ Graph 7 presents the indexed mean of residents' assessment ratings for overall performance, advocacy and community representation, and engagement in decision-making. At least 350 residents were surveyed in each local government area and their responses of 'needs considerable improvement', 'needs some improvement', 'adequate', 'good' or 'excellent' were assigned scores of 20, 40, 60, 80 and 100 respectively to create an indexed mean. If all responses were neutral or if the number of strongly negative responses equalled the number of strongly positive, the indexed mean would be 60-or adequate. Note that these ratings are for overall council performance in each category, rather than relating specifically to performance, advocacy and engagement on environmental issues.

All metropolitan councils that participated in the survey had scores over 60 representing just above adequacy for overall performance in the eyes of the community. Almost all councils score better on their overall performance, than on advocacy and community representation, which in turns ranks higher than engagement in decision-making.

INDICATOR: Graph 7. Community Satisfaction Rating of Council Performance



source: Dept of Local Communities 2002

Note: Data not available for Nillumbik Shire and Moreland City Council

CASE STUDY

Whittlesea’s Environment Events Program

Whittlesea’s Environment Events program grew from the City’s Local Conservation Strategy (LCS), and is a great example of how Council and community are working together to improve local environmental knowledge and action.

The LCS was developed over a two-year period with extensive community consultation. It underpins Whittlesea’s aim of promoting a more ‘sustainable’ community and sought to address the many environmental issues of importance to the local community and Council. The actions in the LCS were developed through a series of community based working groups which met fortnightly over a period of six months to help Council develop the plan.

A major theme that is evident throughout the Strategy is ‘community pride, ownership and education’. The LCS aims to maximise community involvement in local initiatives and raise awareness of environmental issues through a broad range of activities including the ‘environmental seminar series’, which commenced in January 2001 and has continued to evolve.

Initially 13 seminars were held in 2001 and attracted

approximately 220 people. In 2002 a total of 26 seminars were held attracting over 400 residents. Providing a broad range of learning opportunities is a key aim of this program, however more importantly Council seeks to provide residents with the essential knowledge, skills, and hopefully motivation to change behaviour at home.

Currently in its third year, the program offers 28 seminars including: a bus trip to CERES Environmental Park, a tour of local Aboriginal sites of significance, an energy efficient house design workshop, a weed EXPO, a wetlands walk, Darebin Creek/Riparian walk, and a nocturnal walk & talk with the animals.

The environment events program is designed to equip residents with skills, inspiration and knowledge to live sustainably, better understand local environmental issues and implement best land management practices. The events also support community development and capacity building by providing opportunities for residents to meet, learn, share, contribute to and be part of their local community.

For more information www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au (under Waste & Environment)

CASE STUDY

World Environment Day Awards At Monash

The City of Monash celebrated World Environment Day in June 2003 by presenting World Environment Day Awards. The Awards were open to the local community and are aimed at promoting and increasing the community's awareness of the many benefits to be gained from incorporating community action and sustainable practices into projects and activities.

The award categories, and winners, were:

- outstanding example of a sustainable household and residential garden – Wendy van Dok (Glen Waverley)
- Outstanding residential renovation or new building – Gill Read (Hughesdale)
- Outstanding sustainable small business – Wharington International.

- Outstanding sustainable large business or corporate enterprise – The Body Shop (Driver Bus Lines was awarded a special commendation)
- Community and leadership award – Individual Winner: Alessandro Demaio (Wesley College, Glen Waverley), Community Winner: Friends of Damper Creek Reserve (<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~damper/>).

Numerous nominations were received in all award categories. The Awards are designed to celebrate outstanding achievements in the local community in the pursuit of a more liveable and sustainable City. Members of the local community were also involved in the judging process. It is planned that these Awards will become a regular annual event.

For more information www.monash.vic.gov.au

CASE STUDY

Sustainable Peninsula

The Mornington Peninsula Shire is "committed to a Sustainable Peninsula" and sustainability is a core policy of Council, developed and formulated through a comprehensive program of community consultation and community participation. In each of the past three years the Shire has conducted major community forums on the theme of sustainability and how it can be achieved on the peninsula. The first forum sought to identify the values and attributes of the peninsula that were most important to the community. The second and third forums have sought to describe and refine the policy outcomes that are being sought against the internationally accepted principles of ESD. These findings are summarised in what the Shire calls its sustainability matrix.

In addition to the annual events above, the Shire has conducted a series of workshops throughout the municipality on a locality by locality basis in order to explore in detail the meaning and application of the sustainability matrix across the diverse communities of the peninsula. The sustainability matrix has been available on the Shire's website with an open invitation to the community to make comment and suggestions on its content. The sustainability matrix has been discussed in professional planning forums and been reviewed by planning experts and academics with the objective of ensuring its value as a planning tool. The sustainability matrix remains available for comment and the issues of sustainability are required to be addressed in all officer reports to Council.

For more information: www.mornpen.vic.gov.au

Response

Community consultation regarding key environmental areas of concern is undertaken to different degrees and in different ways by different local governments. Almost all councils engage in at least some level of community consultation around environmental issues.

Low level community consultation may consist of the inclusion of questions about the council's environmental performance in a community satisfaction survey or the opportunity for residents or community groups to provide comment on draft strategies.

Councils that lead the way in their approach to sustainability incorporate community consultation and on-going involvement as an important part of developing and implementing strategies and action plans for a wide range of programs. (for an example see Case Study: Community Accountability Essential at Banyule). Gaining broad representation from all sectors of a community including people from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds can be a significant challenge for many consultation programs and in some instances councils need to assess the priorities of a 'vocal minority' against those of less engaged sectors.

Innovative projects such as Sustainability Streets (see Case Study: Sustainability Streets Ahead!), see councils taking a less managed or directive role and instead facilitating community development and sustainability outcomes at a more localised neighbourhood level. The other case studies describe a variety of approaches to community engagement and participation.

CASE STUDY

Zero Net Emissions in the City of Melbourne

The strategy Zero Net Emissions by 2020 outlines how the City of Melbourne in partnership with others will embrace the challenge of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to zero (net) across the municipality over the next 2 decades. The development and implementation of the strategy is a great example of how to gain the necessary support, commitment and collaboration of major stakeholders, to ensure the goals of the strategy are met.

Extensive consultation in the development of the strategy was critical. A steering committee was established with representation from government and non-government agencies, research organisations, business, industry and peak professional bodies. A roundtable was held for CEOs across Melbourne to pitch the idea and approach, and interviews were also conducted.

The consultation gave rise to a shared vision amongst

stakeholders and ensured that the objectives and actions aligned with their priorities. Actions were designed to fill gaps in existing services, address barriers to change, deliver triple bottom line benefits, and be low-cost, market driven solutions, which encourage the development of leading edge knowledge, technology and expertise.

Leading State and Commonwealth agencies, developers, research organisations, peak property and industry groups and international organisations have expressed support for the Strategy. Nine organisations have pursued 5-year agreements with the City, outlining their commitment to undertake pivotal projects. The APEC Expert Group on New and Renewable Energy Technologies has also been working with the City to translate key elements into a generic 'blueprint' for other APEC economies. Support for the Strategy is ever increasing.

For more information visit www.melbourne.vic.gov.au

What else you can do to improve the response to environmental issues?**Councils**

- Develop an organisational wide commitment to sustainability and ensure environmental objectives are well integrated into key strategy documents such as the Municipal Strategic Statement and the Corporate Plan.
- Liaise with other councils and peak bodies to learn about successful consultation and participation processes before tailoring to meet the needs of your local community.
- Ensure that adequate resources are devoted to plan and implement environmental programs and to follow through on any consultation programs undertaken.
- Take action to improve your own council's environmental performance to demonstrate commitment and leadership.
- Develop environmental education programs, environmental community grants, and/or environmental awards to support individuals and community groups in their contributions towards sustainability.

Individuals

- Contact your council to find out about environmental and sustainability programs and how you and or your community group can be involved.
- Get involved in a local community group or work with others to start a new group around a local issue or area.
- Discuss areas of environmental concern with your local councillor or attend a council meeting to raise questions.
- Find out about candidates' track records, views and plans for the environment and sustainability before you vote in the next council election.
- Actively participate in a 'community advisory committee' (or equivalent) and if none exists, lobby your council to establish a process for communication and participation.