

Eurobodalla working towards sustainability

COUNCIL NAME

Eurobodalla Shire Council

WEB ADDRESS

www.esc.nsw.gov.au

SIZE

3,428 square kilometres

POPULATION

37,234

Overview

Eurobodalla Shire Council (ESC) has delivered a wide range of sustainability projects in response to community expectations and to show leadership in doing the right thing for the environment. Sustainability is now an important focus of Council's strategic planning.

Eurobodalla, on the south coast of NSW is known for its pristine beaches, forests and waterways. Council's proactive role in managing invasive species, planning pressures and fostering community partnerships for natural resource management has played an important part in maintaining the unspoilt nature of the region. Over 9,000 hours of bushland management community volunteer work was completed with about 7,000 natives planted in 2014/15. With over 630kW of solar power generation installed and greenhouse emissions dropping, Council plays a leadership role in reducing its own environmental footprint and supporting the community to do the same.

Background

The natural beauty and geography of the Eurobodalla region is highly valued by residents and more than one million people visit the region each year. Eurobodalla Shire Council works hard to maintain these natural assets in partnership with the community, landholders, and other stakeholders.

The two key objectives that guide the sustainability activities of Council are described in *One Community - Community Strategic Plan*, Council's Community Strategic Plan (CSP). The objectives were distilled from the robust and detailed community consultation process with over 3,000 people during the development of the CSP.

Sustainability emerged as one of four key messages the community wants Council to deliver, specifically "that development is respectful, resources are used wisely and we look after our environment for the future." (Council CSP, 2013, pp4).

The more detailed implications of these objectives and the 'on-ground' activities they generate are detailed in the Council's Delivery and Operational Plans. For example, the Eurobodalla 2012-17 Greenhouse Action Plan guides the delivery of Council's response to climate change, outlining 74 actions across the areas of community, energy efficiency, renewable energy, waste, transport, planning, and fleet.

Environmental leadership and sustainability is also fostered internally through the cross-divisional Sustainability Matrix Group. This group has high-level representation from all divisions of Council including Infrastructure, Water and Sewer, Waste, Community Services, Environment and Planning and meets on a regular basis. It has played a key role in initiating, prioritising and evaluating a wide range of sustainability initiatives.



Implementation

Council's sustainability objectives have been implemented through a wide range of programs, initiatives and services. Some examples during 2014-15 include:

- Comingled recycling, green waste and waste services for over 20,000 premises.
- Home composting workshops, with free compost bins given to 300 people.
- Water conservation education delivered to over 20,000 water customers and 236 water rebates provided.
- Environmental treasure hunts promoted to tourists at 12 locations.
- 200 bush-friendly garden visits and over 1500 residents taking part in 'plant swaps' with 6800 native plants planted instead of weeds.
- Over 3,000 invasive species inspections completed.
- Building audits and retrofits with energy and water efficiency solutions at 58 community buildings. Stickers, signage and reports provided at each site.
- Eurobodalla Marine Debris Working Group established. Over 9,000 pieces of marine debris collected and recorded in a database.
- Restoration works in 436 hectares of high value reserves or Endangered Ecological Communities.
- Support to Landcare volunteers who completed over 9,000 hours of weed control and regeneration works on Council reserves.

Project partners have provided much needed grant funding. These include: South-East Local Land Services, NSW Environmental Trust, NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, Regional Development Australia, NSW Department of Primary Industries, Department of Crown Lands, NSW Environment Protection Authority, the National Landcare Program and Green Army program.. Other project partners have included government and non-government organisations who have had a role in supporting, or jointly facilitating projects, or by engaging the community or their constituents.

Outcomes

Achievements from 2014/15 included:

Waste management:

- Successful delivery of fortnightly residential comingled and garden waste recycling services, with residential recycling rates above the state average, including recycling over 1,700 fridges, 2,200 mattresses and 6,000 e-waste items.
- Diverting thousands of tonnes waste excavated material and vegetation from landfill on infrastructure and roads projects.

Climate change

- Currently 70% of the actions in the Eurobodalla 2012-17 Greenhouse Action Plan, have been completed or are being addressed. Council emissions have reduced by over 7% compared to the 2005/06 baseline. Building energy emissions are down 18% compared to the baseline.
- The Community Buildings Sustainability project audited and retrofitted 58 community buildings with water and energy efficiency measures, saving 7,359kL of water and 474 MWh of electricity per year.
- The installation of over 635kW of solar power is nearing completion with a total of 300kW completed in 2014/15.
- Greenhouse emissions have reduced by over 4,000 tonnes CO₂ equivalent per year saving \$1m/year in energy.

Water management

- The water conservation program was continued, which includes water efficiency rebates and community education components.
- WaterSmart Business Program now servicing 50 of the largest water users in the Shire.

- Current water use is 119kL/connection which is the lowest in NSW among local water utilities with >10,000 connections.

Education

- Environmental education services were provided to all 14 local schools and the broader community.
- Community campaigns during 2014/15 included marine debris, 'tap water please' and 'every drop counts'.

Natural resource management

- The South Coast Regional Sea-Level Rise - Planning and Policy Response Framework was adopted. This is now applied to development and planning controls.
- Higher than 80% participation rate amongst landholders in the Deua Rivercare riparian restoration project, covering over 236 hectares of river bank vegetation.
- Continued a successful state-first trial study on using ecological burns as a management technique for Themeda grasslands Endangered Ecological Community.
- The Broulee Biodiversity Certification project was approved by the Minister, and subsequently prompted the associated planning and management of the site.

Key Learnings

Eurobodalla Shire Council has learnt that by embedding sustainability throughout the organisation it results in a better quadruple bottom line outcome i.e. there are not just environmental benefits, but also social, economic and governance benefits as well.

Council is making sure these benefits are ongoing by making sustainability a front and centre consideration in its planning for the future. The latest Delivery Program, Operational Plan 2015-16 (pp2-3) prefaces the whole report with "Building a sustainable future" and a feature box on "embedding sustainability." The benefits resulting from the various sustainability projects will be maintained over the long term. There are many examples of capacity building amongst other staff, community groups, businesses and residents which will ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to maintain the sustainable practices and projects put in place.

Some of the projects and achievements are the result of the excellent work of individual staff or the collaboration of staff at Council. The improved systems and policies will help to ensure sustainability is an ongoing consideration in future projects, even if key staff move on. Council will continue to consolidate sustainable policies and practices.

In the years ahead Council will be making sure it reaches its target of reducing its emissions by 25% by 2020. Steps will be taken in planning and infrastructure services to ensure that Council, the community and the local environment are prepared for and resilient to the impacts of climate change.

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Eurobodalla Shire Council was the 2015 winner of the Local Sustainability Award at the LGNSW Excellence in the Environment Awards