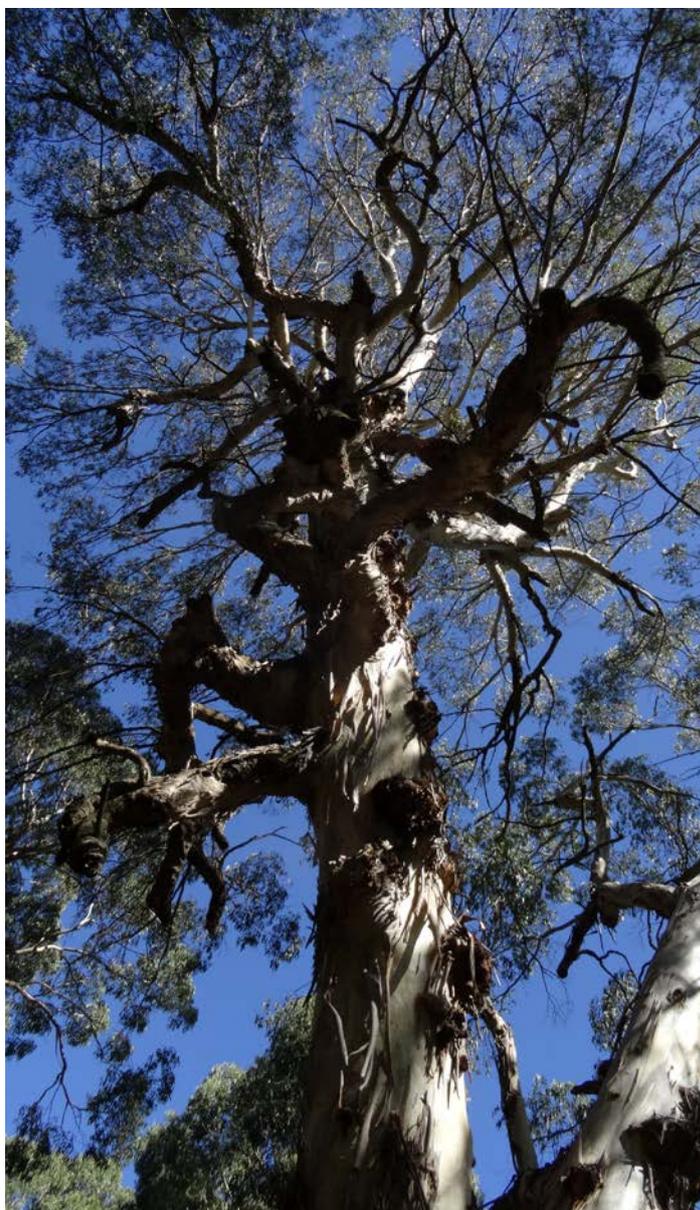


Community submission to the development of the Shire of Strathbogie Council Plan 2017-2021

March 2017



prepared by Strathbogie Voices

Introduction

Members of the Strathbogie community met on two specific occasions to discuss how our Council Plan could better address climate change, caring for our environment and using the resources of our region more sustainably. In total, approximately 70 community members met and provided input at these two meetings. What follows is an attempt to give expression to the comments and contribution of the community.

Three councillors (Cr. John Mason, Cr. Mick Williams and Cr. Kate Stothers) attended the first of these meetings. Carole Hammond (Sustainable Development Officer) attended the second meeting.

In some sections, there is an emphasis on specific actions in Euroa. This reflects the location of the meetings. Most of the actions recommended remain broad and are pertinent to the whole Shire. The Strathbogie ranges and Violet Town and surrounds were also well represented.

Communities across the state recognise the need for urgent climate action. People want change to 'business as usual'. In many parts of the world, renewable energy is now mainstream; reduction of waste is now routine; altered farming and business practices are understood to be pivotal to sustaining livelihoods.

Community members present at both meetings are engaged with these issues. They are solution oriented and they want the Shire to be curious, ambitious and ethical, both generally and specifically with respect to climate change and sustainability action.

Local people want to be involved in initiatives. They have expertise and they know the community.

Authorship:

The first Community Meeting was held on Sunday 12th February at the Flour Mill. There were at least 50 community member present and representatives from Euroa Arboretum, Euroa Environment Group, Strathbogie Ranges Conservation Management Network, Strathbogie Sustainable Forest Group, Friends of the Sevens, and various Landcare Groups.

The second meeting was held on Saturday 4th March at a local Euroa residence with other community members with special expertise. Summary data from the first meeting was presented and further discussion with a particular focus on actions was held.

Both meetings were facilitated by Lisa Rasmussen, a local landholder in Upotipotpon with expertise in facilitation, health and land conservation.

This summary document has been written by Lisa Rasmussen, Shirley Saywell, Andi Kofler, Kate Auty and Charlie Brydon.

March 2017

Goals

We want a shire with a big vision, which:

- is ambitious, curious and ethical.
- is inclusive of community expertise.
- recognises and includes Indigenous people and culture.
- fosters community leadership and local employment.
- promotes social justice and welcomes refugees.
- cultivates a physically and mentally healthy community, living harmoniously and sustainably.
- assists its community to adjust to a changing climate.
- protects and enhances the natural environment.
- meets the needs of the present generation without diminishing the opportunities of future generations.

Contents

Governance

Economic Development

Health and wellbeing

Infrastructure and the built environment

Natural environment

Sustainable land use

Governance

'Council needs to take on a leadership role – they should not be alone in the implementation of all tasks. We have a shire of citizens ... transparency and community engagement are paramount in building a sustainable living environment – a sustainable shire'

Actions

The Shire should:

- *Train Council staff in climate change mitigation and adaptation and support staff to implement and evaluate changes.*
- *Embed sustainability across all operations in the shire and monitor progress.*
- *Reconsider and audit current competitive tendering practices as they can drive unsustainable, seemingly 'lowest cost' approaches. The Shire should consider the recent Australian Institute of Company Directors advice to board directors about their responsibilities to factor in climate change (and the environment) in decision making.*
- *Build a commitment to ethical and green procurement. The Council should review all existing contracts in the light of sustainable practices and actively helping to mitigate climate change. Together Council and contractors could review for example, energy usage, sustainability of materials used, adopting recycling practices, disposal of end products and ethical labour issues.*
- *Partner with other councils as part of the Goulburn Broken Greenhouse Alliance.*
- *Employ a grants officer and actively pursue every grant opportunity.*
- *Consistently and transparently communicate sustainability and environmental policies with the community.*
- *Review the council fleet policy – electrify the fleet, GIS vehicles to determine best practice use, train council employees in eco-driving, ensure that contractors are operating as eco-drivers.*
- *Develop sustainable social enterprise initiatives, including implementing a 'Solar Savers' initiative for retirees and those in social housing; sourcing bulk buy insulation opportunities. Work closely with Moreland Energy Foundation Ltd (MEFL) and Yarra Energy Foundation.*
- *Develop a solar power strategy for all council buildings.*
- *Develop a sustainability policy for ALL contractors to be monitored and evaluated annually.*
- *Conduct an awareness raising program for local businesses and community to understand how we can shift our investments to options that are less damaging to the environment and*

ones that will help mitigate climate change. There are many experts who could guide this initiative.

- *Review the Council Plan in the last year of the plan* and proposed and delivered actions be assessed and evaluated.
- Have regular *conversation cafes* to propose new projects and new opportunities.
- Develop a *communication strategy* using all media.

Economic Development

'We have many strengths to work from: our mix of cultures, our natural environment and current industries. The shire itself could take steps to be a positive role model. It could take up solar power ... shift its superannuation to a fund that does not invest in fossil fuels and ... actively invest in local sustainable initiatives'.

Actions

The Shire should:

- Implement and review the strategies in the existing Strathbogie Planning Scheme - Sustainable Economic Growth (Municipal Strategic Statement 2013 – Clause 21.06).
- *Stimulate an investment culture by exploring the establishment of a Community Bank.*
- *Stimulate community owned assets* eg. a renewable energy storage company eg Redflow. Advanced Energy Storage.
- Drive and *encourage economic initiatives* that focus on environmentally sustainable food production, reduced food packaging, increased local food production (build on Farmers' Market, start a nature strip garden program, introduce community compost) and promotion of sustainable buying choices.
- Investigate partnerships / franchise opportunities / co-op models in regard to:
 - Pre-fab housing production - Euroa Timber Yard, Ford McKernan Engineering
 - Restoration of heritage buildings eg Northey – as a training facility for hospitality students and eco-tourism ventures
 - Feral Animal Pet Food / Fur factory – from culled kangaroo / carp / rabbits / foxes
 - Wool / Alpaca industry value adding
 - Forest / Fitness / Food / Tourism – incorporating home-stay / Air BnB / Forest Tree Houses
 - Meet and establish partnership with “Plastic Forests” at Strathmerton to recycle bale twine and other agricultural by-products.
- Resource local businesses to *audit their energy, water, waste and procurement.*

- Develop a *sporting hub* focusing on active and healthy lives.
- Develop a *sustainable farming methods* program.
- Develop a *renewable energy* program. This will need a strong mix of wind, solar, new battery technology and potentially pumped hydro.
- Promote *reduce, reuse and recycle* through
 - bulk purchasing
 - the Boomerang Bags initiative
 - a Shire-led education initiative to work with all businesses (one-on-one) to reduce, re-use and recycle in their own practices
 - the Men's Shed to become a 'fix-it' station
 - tip to become a 'Go-round' centre
 - an e-waste program in compliance with proposed legislation.
- *Transport initiatives* including
 - bike hire
 - bike track to the arboretum
 - increase the bike parking areas throughout our towns
 - regular bus services to Shepparton, Benalla and Seymour
 - strategic sharing of existing mini and school bus services
 - link with politicians Cathy McGowan and Susanna Sheed to promote a better rail service.
 - car-pooling program to help people travel to their places of work and commonly visited regional services (possibly via electronic media)
 - an electric charging vehicle station
 - Uber for Towns and the district
- Introduce by-laws to *establish a plastic bag free Shire*.

Health and well-being

'Climate change is the greatest threat to our health. It is greater than any other health threat we have ever faced as a rural community. Our carbon consuming, over-eating and sedentary habits are literally killing us. Luckily, what is good for the planet is good for our health. Tackling climate change could be the greatest health opportunity of the 21st century'.

Actions

The Shire should:

- Implement and review the strategies in the existing Strathbogie Planning Scheme - Sustainable Communities (Municipal Strategic Statement 2013 – Clause 21.05)

Shire Infrastructure priorities must include:

- The *re-establishment of the local community centre in Euroa* to ensure the community has access to sustainability programs and grants about chronic and acute health matters, healthy living, healthy eating and climate change issues.

- *Facilitate and lead community education programs on kitchen gardens, reduced meat consumption, cooking with plant-based foods, active transport and exercise programs.*
- *The retention and development of the Euroa Swimming pool (and all other public pools in the region). Development could include extending pool season, utilising solar energy, water aerobics, hydro-therapy programs, more shade trees, development of a healthy eating business at pool, community garden associated with the pool.*
- *A heat island effect policy – including a urban forest strategy, widespread increase in shade trees throughout all towns, reduce concrete/asphalt surfaces, increase parks, artificial shade.*
- *Install drinking fountains and conduct an education campaign around choosing tap water.*
- *Install exercise stations in parks.*
- *Encourage the use of nature strips for local healthy food production.*

With respect to *general wellbeing* the Shire must implement:

- A reviewed and renewed Healthy Communities Strategy to address social challenges presented by such proposals as the introduction of poker machines in our towns and to ensure that seniors and youth are considered in the development of Shire policies.
- A reviewed and renewed Inclusive Communities Strategy to *embrace and support refugee and other marginalised communities* and to include the establishment of a *refugee welcome zone*.

With respect to *advocacy and service delivery* the Shire should:

- Continue to lobby and advocate with others, for sub-acute *public beds at the Euroa hospital*.
- Adopt every VicHealth and other State and Federal programs to *support mental health services* for all community, including links to institutions like Uni of Melbourne Rural Health, and the National Institute of Farmer Health at Deakin University.
- Support *emergency services* essential for climate change conditions including heatwaves and fires.

Infrastructure and the Built Environment

‘Community members are solution oriented and they want sustainability action that will properly address climate change. For example, we need a public transport revolution not an evolution. We need a multidirectional system not just a line down a corridor. Local people want to be involved in initiatives. They have expertise and they know the community.’

Actions

The Shire should: -

- Implement and review the strategies in the existing Strathbogie Planning Scheme - Sustainable Infrastructure (Municipal Strategic Statement 2013 – Clause 21.07).

- Implement and review the strategies in the existing Strathbogie Planning Scheme - Sustainable Settlement (Municipal Strategic Statement 2013 – Clause 21.02).
- *Utilise existing local government networks* eg. Council Alliance for a Sustainable Built Environment (CASBE) and Built Environment Sustainability Scorecard (BESS).

With respect to *transport* the shire should:

- *Actively promote and resource action and discussion about a comprehensive integrated transport system* (passengers and freight) for the Shire. This system needs to address transport within towns, between towns and from major centres like Melbourne and Sydney.
- Actively work with State and Federal government to support *fast train options* between major centres.
- Conduct a feasibility study and a 12-month trial into cost effective options, using local buses and car pooling programs for travel between surrounding towns.
- Start a walking bus at council to create political momentum including a ‘front carriage’.

With respect to *streets (specific to Euroa)* the Shire should:

- Make Binney Street more pedestrian friendly between Brock St and Railway St to calm traffic and promote the better use of the space for periodic retail and markets (consider closure -this could just be between certain times or making this section a one-way street).
- Change the quadrant – Kirkland – Anderson – Clifton – Railway Street to a mixed traffic zone.
- Reduce traffic speeds in residential areas and install speed controls and a pedestrian crossing at kindergarten.
- Develop McGuinness St car park as a caravan/camper parking precinct with well-placed signage.
- Use the Binney St laneway as an E/V station.

With respect to *sustainability for residential and business premises* the Shire should:

- Lead a sustainability program and provide a sustainability portal for residential premises to support knowledge sharing.

With respect to *Sustainability and Shire buildings* the Shire should:

- Meet basic sustainability requirements on energy, water and waste and implemented changes need to be subject to monitoring and measurement.

With respect to *sustainable community services* the Shire should:

- The Shire should develop a visitor information centre in Violet Town and actively promote the Euroa Hub.
- The Shire should lobby for better internet infrastructure with Federal and State Government.

Natural Environment

'Many environmental programs that have been available in recent times have been eroded or have disappeared and gaps are found in the current Shire Environment Strategy and Roadside Management Plan'.

Actions

The Shire should:

- Implement and review the strategies in the existing Strathbogie Planning Scheme - Sustainable Environment (Municipal Strategic Statement 2013 – Clause 21.04)

The Shire should ensure:

- That forests and special local places like *Mount Wombat, Gooram Falls, Polly McQuinns*, and catchments and ecology are valued, promoted, and considered in decisions about the economic (including tourism), social, cultural and environmental future of the region
- A *weeds policy* is appropriately resourced with respect to Shire roads and roadsides. This must include measures to ensure contractors comply with the use of appropriate herbicides for native roadside vegetation.
- *Works contractors* are supervised and penalties are applied when breaches occur.
- The ambiguity of the *native vegetation clearance rules* is clarified to prevent the further loss of valuable remnant vegetation.
- That it adopts a program to increase *paddock trees* and that it advertises and appropriately enforces the protections available to existing paddock trees
- That it advertises the availability and support the delivery of *incentives for the protection of the natural environment* including paddock trees, grasslands and remnant vegetation.
- The introduction of a *land management program* that supports land managers to contribute to conserving our natural vegetation eg. extending roadside vegetation adjacent to private land. This could be *supported by rate rebates*, but administered by Trust for Nature (TFN). This would relieve Council of the administrative burden.
- It supports other Victorian Councils in their pro-active stance on the creation of the Great Forest National Park (GFNP).
- That the *Roadside Management Plan* and the *Environment Strategy 2011* are reviewed, updated and implemented (in the next 6 months).
- That it *efficiently and inclusively supports, resources and uses the community knowledge bank* available in the Shire of Strathbogie about the natural environment (including the Euroa *Arboretum* and its staff and volunteers), and any education program could and should include digital technologies and other sources of information.

- *The development and implementation of a feral cats, foxes, rabbits and kangaroos policy.*
- *A firewood collection policy is developed and enforced.*
- *Enforcement of native vegetation clearance regulations with prosecutions and fines in a timely manner.*
- *Staff training in land management best practice is mandated*
- *The development of a package for landowners that sells the Shire as a place that values the natural environment. This must include a list of appropriate plantings, State and Federal prohibited weeds and relevant land management regulations. This will need to involve close collaboration with real estate agents and potential new land holders.*
- *Reduce speed limits on country roads (rather than remove natural vegetation) to both minimize high fatality traffic zones and protect known wildlife populations*

Sustainable land use

‘Sustainability is meeting the needs of the present generation without diminishing the opportunities of future generations’.

Actions

The Shire should:

- *Recognise the diversity of land types in the region and prioritise the development of land use strategies which reflect climate change and the need to adapt.*
- *Promote and support a detailed examination of which farming practices will continue to be efficient / effective/ beneficial to the community in the longer term.*
- *Acknowledge the number of new landholders entering the Shire and assist community environmental organisations to provide support, education and guidance as to available resources and how to access them.*
- *Facilitate candid and open discussion about the move to intensive agriculture in some areas and provide a forum to address all potential conflicts with established farming practices and community interests.*
- *Facilitate discussion about practices such as stubble burning for cropping and poor firebreaks around old paddock-trees and provide guidance about improvements.*
- *Work with Trust for Nature and other philanthropic groups to reintroduce the rate reduction as an effective inducement for more responsible land management practices.*

- *Employ a grants officer* to obtain grants and promote knowledge in the farming and general community of all available funding sources.
- Assist the farming community with *Conservation Management Plans* and other transition techniques to other farm business models which promote the producing of more with less, and assist the community to understand and address the issues of lifestyle properties.
- *Monitor land use management practices rigorously and transparently*, reporting on programs and developments. This monitoring work must be resourced adequately and it should encourage community involvement in the process. Reporting must be used to educate and communicate the outcomes whether positive or negative.