

Melton City Council Environment Plan: Consultation Phase 1 Outcomes Report

Introduction

Melton City Council is currently developing an overarching Environment Plan. Council is responsible for a range of services that have environmental impacts, including Planning, Infrastructure Management and Waste Management. Presently a range of approaches to environmental management are employed, however Council sees benefit in developing an overarching strategy to facilitate ongoing improved environmental outcomes.

The Plan will:

- Clearly articulate Council's vision for the future;
- Ensure Council meets legislative requirements;
- Provide strategic guidance for environmental decision-making;
- Be developed through consultation; and
- Ensure an integrated approach to environmental management.

The Environment Plan will be aligned with the strategic objectives of the Council Plan, as well as being integrated with existing Council policies, plans and strategies, including the Waste Management Strategy, the Integrated Transport Strategy and the Public Health and Well-being Plan.

As this is Council's first Environment Plan, the focus will be on environmental impacts from Council's internal activities and service delivery. It is likely that in future iterations of the plan there will be a stronger focus on community impacts, however this plan aims to manage our corporate impacts to enable Council to provide environmental leadership to the community. Through demonstrating effective environmental management, Council will assist in creating a more sustainable and resilient community.

Consultation overview

Internal consultation

As the plan has a focus on internal impacts, it is important that it be informed and developed through internal consultation.

The purpose of the internal engagement is to:

- Inform Council that the plan is being developed;
- Identify priority areas for the Environment Plan;
- Have staff start think of their roles responsibilities in environmental management; and
- Begin identification of goals and actions.

In 2015, internal consultation began with the formation of the Project Working Group (PWG). The PWG is made up of 14 members from across Council, mostly Coordinators, who were selected based on their interest and influence on environmental issues across the organization.

Through a series of workshops, a spreadsheet of 46 actions was developed with the PWG. These actions were then organized into key themes, and used to develop a Community Directions Paper. The themes are biodiversity, climate change, waste and water.

The aim of the Directions Paper was to:

- Inform the community that the Plan is being developed;
- Provide information on how the Plan is being developed;
- Articulate the corporate focus of the Plan; and
- Introduce the four key themes.

Internal consultation further included meetings with the Project Control Group and the Project Working Group, an initial series of meetings with relevant business units within Council, and a briefing and workshop with Councillors and the Executive Team. Internal consultation will be ongoing throughout the development of the Plan.

External consultation

To ensure that the Plan is aligned with community expectations, the community will have two opportunities to provide feedback into the Plan's development. The first phase of consultation is now complete, and a second phase of consultation following the development of the draft Plan.

The purpose of the community engagement was to:

- Inform the community of the development of the plan;
- Communicate Council's environmental achievements to date; and
- Offer an opportunity to provide input to the draft Plan.

External consultation was done through surveys, a Directions Paper, consultation sessions and stalls at Council's *My City, My Say* events. The community was informed through social media, emails, a media release and a dedicated page on Council's website. Environment Groups were contacted directly by email, inviting them to attend the *My City, My Say* events, provide a submission to the Directions Paper, fill out the online survey or contact the Environmental Policy Officer with any additional feedback.

Methods

Survey

A short survey was developed as the primary mechanism for the community to provide feedback. The survey was designed to be easily completed by anyone, whether they had read the Directions Paper or not. For members of the community with more interest, the Directions Paper outlined additional questions and invited further comments or questions.

The survey was available in hard copy at four community consultation events, as well as online through the Plan's dedicated webpage, and promoted through social media, and the link to the

survey was sent around by email to 25 environment groups across Council (Figure 1). A modified three question version was used for consultation at the LEADS sessions.

The survey received 68 responses online, and 35 hard copies were completed. The modified survey was completed by 103 members of our CALD community. A total of 206 surveys and modified surveys were completed.

Environment Group Type	Name
Biodiversity and Environment Groups	Melton Environment Group
	Friends of Lerderderg Gorge
	Friends of the Melton Botanic Garden
	Friends of Eynesbury Forest
	Friends of Toolern Creek
	Friends of Werribee Gorge and Long Forest Malle Inc
	Pinkerton Landcare and Environment Group
	Parwan Landcare Group
	Toolern Vale Landcare Group
	Truganina Landcare Group
Animal Welfare Groups	Caroline Springs Animal Welfare Network
Bird Watching Groups	Werribee Wagtails
	Melton Bird Watching Group
	Eynesbury Bird Enthusiasts Groups
Bushwalking Groups	Melton Bushwalkers
Garden and Plant Groups	Australian Plant Society Melton and Bacchus Marsh
	Melton Garden Club
	Edible Harvest Out West
Residents Groups	Exford Residents and Landowners Association
Recycling Groups	Melton Bowerbirds
Sustainability Groups	Melton Sustainable Living Group Inc.
Environmental Education Centre	Dingo Discovery Sanctuary and Research Centre
Scouts groups	1st Caroline Springs Scouts
	2nd Melton Scouts
	3rd Melton Scouts

Figure 1: Melton Environment Groups contacted.

My City, My Say events

Melton City Council's schedule of community engagement events was well aligned with the timeline of community consultation for the Environment Plan (Figure 2). The events offered an opportunity to promote the development of the Plan to a broader audience than would have been achievable through dedicated drop-in sessions.

MEET US IN ROCKBANK	MEET US IN DIGGERS REST	MEET US IN TOOLERN VALE	MEET US IN EYNESBURY/EXFORD
School Hall and Sports Pavilion	Community Hall and Recreation Reserve	Community Hall	Eynesbury, near the Farmers Market
Saturday 16 April 2016	Saturday 30 April 2016	Saturday 14 May 2016	Sunday 29 May 2016

Figure 2: Council's *My City, My Say* events schedule for 2016.

Although the events had a relatively low attendance, 35 surveys were completed across four sessions. Various brochures and handouts promoting Council's Environmental Services programs and other information on sustainability were also available. Materials included Council's Sustainable Gardening Guide and a booklet of Melton's flora and fauna. For residents with more interest in the Plan, the Directions Paper was available to provide more information and invite additional feedback.

LEADS Energy Efficiency Training Group Sessions

Over four sessions in April and May, participants from Council's LEADS program were consulted on the Environment Plan. Melton City Council's LEADS Energy Efficiency program provided training to community groups to empower them to increase their energy efficiency in their homes. As they would have learned in their sessions about the relationship between energy usage and climate change, it was an appropriate tie in to discuss the Plan.

As the groups were largely made up of linguistically diverse groups, participants were given a three question modified survey. Council facilitators were seated at tables with participants to assist in scribing responses as necessary. A translator was also on-site to provide help as required.

In total over 100 people were consulted, giving Council opportunity to engage with groups that may have not otherwise been involved in discussions around environmental management.

Library displays

For one week towards the end of the community consultation, interactive display boards were set up in the foyers at Caroline Springs Library and Melton Library and Learning Hub. The aim of the displays was to promote the development of the Plan, and direct residents to the website and the survey, or to the Environmental Policy Officer if they had questions or comments.

Responses are summarised in Figure 3.

What are the main environmental issues facing Melton?
Rubbish in waterways
People with bad habits
Native grasslands vanishing
Urban development
Degradation of weir near Clarks Road
Urban sprawl
Littering
Lack of knowledge around Melton's history and heritage
Cigarette butt pollution

How would you like to see Council address these issues?
Clean up days for creeks
Use less glyphosates
Increase awareness of fragile ecosystems
Family clean up days
Instill a sense of sacredness about the earth
Stop the tip
Not to waste water or electricity

Figure 3: Responses to interactive library displays.

Councillor and Executive Team engagement

At the Councillor briefing on Monday, 16 May, the Environmental Policy Officer provided a briefing to the Councillors and Executive Team. The presentation included an update on the Plan's progression and an overview of the Directions Paper. This was followed by a short workshop based around the following three questions:

1. Thinking 20 years into the future, what is your vision for Melton's environment?
2. What are the biggest environmental issues Council is currently facing?
3. What are some big picture solutions to address these issues?

Themes that emerged include: increasing community awareness and knowledge around environmental issues (in particular targeting children), exploring renewable energy and alternative water options and improving management of waste.

Business unit meetings

A series of meetings was arranged across 12 business units. The purpose of these meetings was to inform staff that the plan was being developed, start the conversation around their roles and responsibilities in environmental management, and discuss opportunities for improved environmental management within their service area.

As the success of the Plan's implementation will depend on its integration with Council's current processes, it is essential that actions be informed by those that will be implementing the Plan. As the Plan is developed, ongoing internal consultation will be required to identify and prioritise actions.

Survey results

Question 1- What are Melton's most important environmental features?

This question was included to gain some understanding around the environmental features that the community values most. By identifying these assets, Council can prioritise key areas of environmental management for inclusion.

It may also provide useful information for priority areas for Council to raise community awareness in the future. For example, the community may place a high value on Melton's waterways and water habitat, but not view climate change as being of high importance, unaware of the negative impacts it will have on our waterways. Targeted public awareness around the link between the two may assist in inspiring more climate friendly behaviours.

Over half of respondents (114 responses) indicated Melton’s waterways were the city’s most important feature, stressing the need to protect our creeks, rivers and wetlands. This high response rate may be due to the high number of responses to the survey we received from Melton’s environment groups, many of whom are actively involved in activities to protect and enhance our waterways, including planting and bank enforcement. Regardless of this however, waterways clearly are of high importance to the community.

Open spaces were the second most frequent response (99 responses), and biodiversity was third (73 responses). Grasslands and forests were other frequently heard responses.

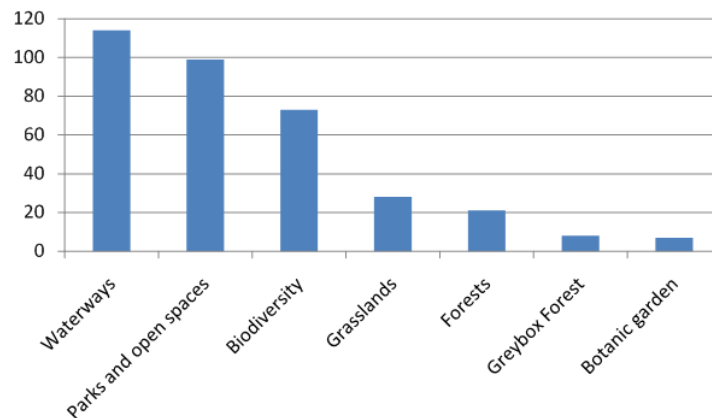


Figure 4: Responses to Question 1.

Question 2 – What do you value most about these features?

The purpose of this question was to have the community start thinking about why they valued the environment, whether it be for the ecosystem services they provide or for recreational use.

This question was not included in the modified survey that was used in the LEADS consultation sessions due to language and time restraints in the sessions. The results are thus based on 103 responses (Figure 5).

The top three responses (clean air, biodiversity and recreation) account for the bulk of the answers. Recreation included activities such as bushwalking, bird-watching and playing with their kids.

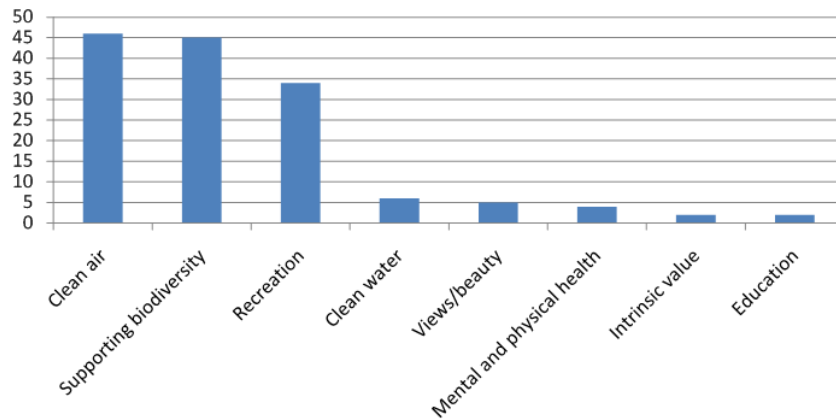


Figure 5: Responses to Question 2.

Question 3 – What are the priority issues for Council to address?

The third question was designed to understand the community’s priority areas for Council action. For this question we included the answers, which were selected because they are within Council’s control and influence. Leaving this question open ended may have resulted in suggestions that were not within Council’s control and therefore overpromising to the community.

The top three issues for Council to address were:

- Protection of waterways
- Conservation of native flora and fauna
- Community engagement to increase environmental awareness

Question 4 – What is the biggest threat to Melton’s environment?

Due to comprehension issues with this question in the first LEADS session, this question was excluded from the three final sessions. For that reason, we received a total of 137 responses to this question (68 from the online survey, 35 hard copy surveys and 34 from the first LEADS group).

The biggest threat to Melton’s environment was overwhelmingly around population increases and associated development. The second highest mentioned response was rubbish dumping (Figure 6).

Given the growth Melton is experiencing, it is not surprising that development is the number one concern of the community. Development that does not adequately consider the environment can lead to a range of impacts, including increased greenhouse gas emissions, loss of natural habitat and biodiversity, impacted water quality from stormwater runoff and lack of access to open space.

Perhaps slightly surprising given the urgency and seriousness of the problem is the lack of community prioritisation on climate change action. This may be an indication of a lack of understanding of how climate change impacts will be felt locally in Melton. Given what the science is telling us about climate change and its widespread impacts on our environment and the community’s health and well-being, and legislated responsibilities, climate change remains a high priority issue for Council to address.

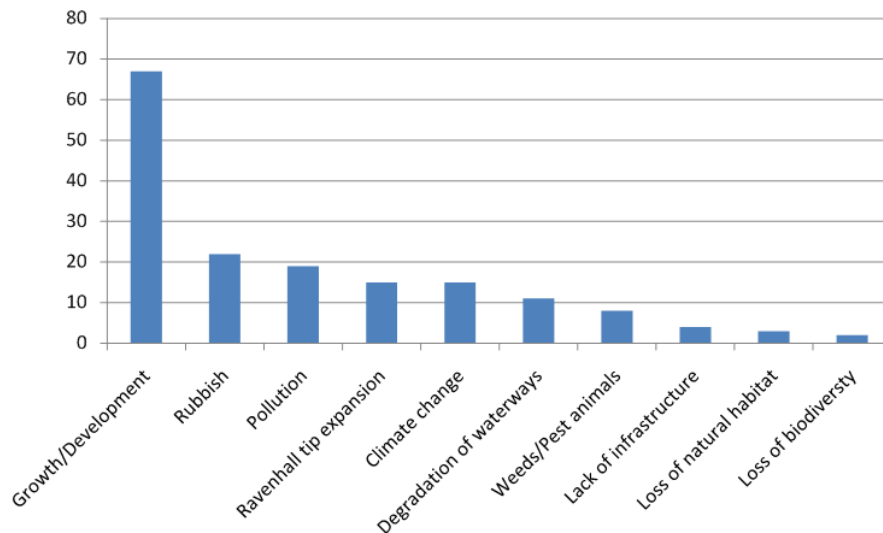


Figure 6: Responses to Question 4.

Question 5: What is your vision for Melton’s environment?

This question was included to get a sense of the community’s long term vision for Melton’s environment. Developing a community vision assists in understanding the long term wants and needs in the community, and can assist in developing and prioritizing other aspects of the plan, including goals and actions.

A wide range of responses were recorded for this question, and they have been grouped into buckets as shown in Figure 7. 33% (68 responses) of respondents would like to see more parks and open space within which the community can use for recreation and enjoyment of nature, including walking and biking. 24% (48 responses) of respondents have a vision for environmentally sensitive development in balance with the ecological health of the municipality. 22% (44 responses) would like to see the preservation of healthy and well connected natural spaces, and 17% would like to see a clean city with less rubbish (35 responses).

The words most often used when describing their vision for the environment were “green” (29 mentions) and “clean” (35 mentions). Select vision statements are recorded in Figure 8.

Vision for Melton’s environment	Number of responses
More space for community to engage with nature (walking paths, parks etc)	68
Balancing growth and development with protection of the natural environment	48
Connected, healthy, well-maintained natural areas	44
Cleaner/Less rubbish	35
Supporting and protecting biodiversity	30
"Greener", more trees	29

Improved water management (WSUD, protected waterways, recycled water)	22
Environmentally sustainable community behaviour	18
Sustainable transport options	10
Active transport options	6
Infrastructure meeting needs	6
Renewable energy	6
Leader in climate action	3
Landfill closed	4
More jobs	1
Maintaining the country atmosphere	1

Figure 7: Responses to Question 5.

Select vision statements
A balance of nature interwoven with buildings
A community that actively collaborates to reduce their ecological footprint while protecting and restoring connected natural environments
Planning has provided wide corridors for sustainable populations of the indigenous flora and fauna of Melton
A town committed to renewable energy use and sustainable development
I'd like to see conservation and enhancement of our current environmental values, done in a way that lets people interact with the environment and become more aware of the impact they have. I'd really like to see green streetscapes, and environmentally sensitive design of the new estate

Figure 8: Select community vision statements.

Conclusion

Council received a wide range of suggestions and comments from our community through the consultation. The results from the survey indicate that the community highly values the natural open space available in Melton, and their ability to access and engage with the environment. Priority areas they would like to see Council address are protecting waterways, conserving native flora and fauna and increasing environmental awareness in the community.

Increased population and development was seen as the biggest threat to Melton's environment, followed by illegal rubbish dumping. Although addressing litter is not within the corporate scope of the Plan, the high community concern for the issue warrants its inclusion, and options will be sought to improve management of the issue within the theme of waste.

The top three issues that respondents indicated for Council to address correspond to two of the four key themes identified through internal consultation and elaborated on in the Directions Paper: biodiversity and water. Climate change, another key theme, ranked low in terms of what respondents viewed as a priority for Council action. Responses from the LEADS session tended to emphasise climate change more than general responses. As the LEADS program participants would have received training on the causes and impacts of climate change, it is not surprising that they would see climate change as a threat to Melton's environment, and may indicate a lack of awareness around the issue in the general population.

The outcomes from the survey and consultation confirm that the Melton community values its environment, and wants to see Council conserve and protect it, with particular emphasis on native

flora and fauna and our water ecosystems. Lastly, consultation revealed that the community strongly supports increased engagement to increase environmental awareness. This indicates that the community understands that Council's ability to protect and enhance Melton's environment is limited without community cooperation, and stresses the role of the Plan in providing environmental leadership.

The first phase of consultation for the Environment Plan has been a key step in identifying themes and issues for inclusion in the Plan. As the draft Plan is developed, ongoing internal consultation will prioritise goals and actions as informed by feedback from the first phase of community consultation.