



Environmental Education Plan 2020-2024



Mildura Rural City Council

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1. Acknowledgement of Country

Mildura Rural City Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land, which now comprises the Mildura Rural City municipality. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and celebrate and respect their continuing cultures and acknowledge the memories of their ancestors.

2. Executive Summary

Mildura Rural City Council (Council) sees environmental education as an important component to support responsible and sustainable natural resource consumption in the community.

Council recognises that sustainable resource consumption is an important factor in limiting our community's contribution to climate change. In February 2020 Council declared that we are in a state of climate emergency that requires urgent action. This Plan supports the actions that Council has committed to under the declaration, including conducting community consultation to develop community owned and activated climate change mitigation and adaption strategies.

The sustainable use of electricity and water benefits the environment and can influence the economic sustainability of the community. Increasing the community's awareness about the benefits of biodiversity and the natural environment encourages the community to value these assets for native animal habitat and amenity. Ensuring the community is aware of the importance of sustainable waste management, including reducing waste production, is a crucial factor in effectively managing our natural resources.

This plan defines Council's strategic vision to implement a framework for ongoing environmental education.

Council's commitment to environmental education includes the implementation of the following key actions:

- Development and implementation of environmental education programs targeting children and youth.
- Utilisation of the Mildura Eco Village as a key environmental learning and awareness facility.
- Development and implementation of a comprehensive annual environmental education and awareness plan.

This plan will be delivered by Council staff with the support and establishment of partnerships with stakeholders.

3. Introduction

3.1. Our Municipality

Council is located approximately 500 kilometres north-west of Melbourne in Victoria, covering an area of 22,330 square kilometres and supports a municipal population of around 53,000 in the Local Government Area. Major centres include Mildura, Red Cliffs, Merbein and Ouyen (see Figure 1).

Attractions to the Mildura area include its temperate climate, the Murray and Darling Rivers and National Parks. The Mildura economy is strong due to the surrounding agricultural base and its location as a regional hub, with the Calder Highway from Melbourne crossing the Sturt Highway, connecting Sydney to Adelaide.

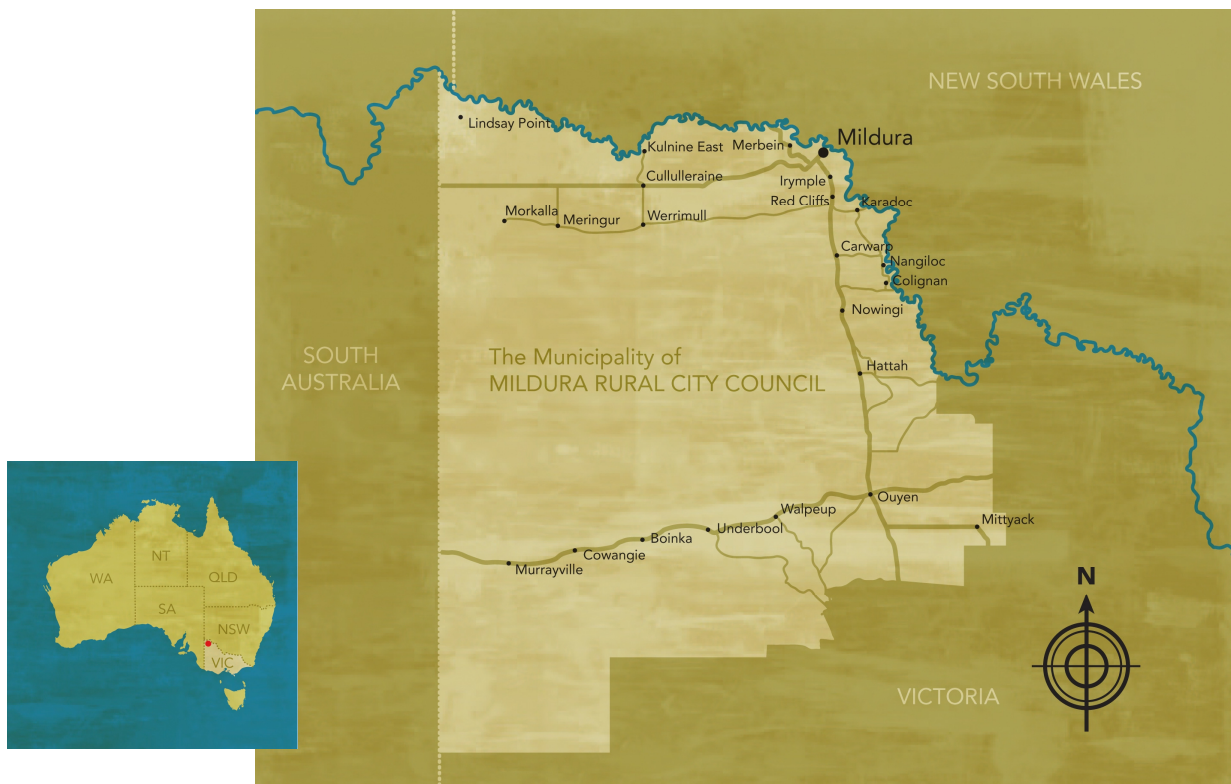


Figure 1. The municipality of Mildura Rural City Council

3.2. Our Vision

The *Community and Council Plan 2017-2021* is Council's primary strategic planning document. Council is dedicated to implementing the Community and Council Plan with a commitment to 'Environmental Sustainability'. A strategic goal of the plan is 'A well-educated community in regards to environmental sustainability'.

3.3. Purpose of the Plan

The Environmental Education Plan documents existing and proposed actions undertaken by Council to inform and educate the community about environmental sustainability. This document is intended for internal use by Council branches to guide activities throughout the community.

Council seeks to increase environmental awareness through a range of communications, as well as supporting community action and behavioural change toward ecologically sustainable living. Council

will support and implement an integrated education program that includes the key areas of energy conservation, waste management, biodiversity and water conservation.

4. Background

4.1. General

Environmental education has been undertaken by Council for many years. Previous documents that demonstrate Council's commitment to environmental education include the *Environmental Awareness Strategy 2007-2012*, *Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2010-2015* and *Environmental Education Plan 2015-2019*.

By increasing awareness about environmental sustainability in the community, Council aims to build a more resilient community that can manage the impacts of climate change, that uses less natural resources, produces less waste and can cope better with increasing costs associated with energy and water consumption.

4.2. Existing Plans, Strategies, Policies and Guidelines

Existing plans, strategies, policies and guidelines that relate to this plan are listed below:

- Vegetation Management Plan 2020-2024
- Invasive Plants and Animals Plan 2020-2024
- Energy Management Plan 2017-2021
- Municipal Waste Management Plan 2009-2014
- Environmental Sustainability Policy
- Water and Energy Use Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities
- Sustainable Water Use Guidelines
- Wetland Management Guidelines.

4.3. Stakeholders

Environmental education involves various stakeholder groups. Implementing the most effective environmental education programs involves identifying key stakeholders and their roles, and working collaboratively to deliver them. The following table outlines key stakeholders and their respective roles.

Stakeholder	Role
Loddon Mallee Waste and Resource Recovery Group	Work with Sustainability Victoria, Councils, businesses and communities to ensure state-wide sustainability education programs are adapted to the needs of each region and to facilitate the delivery of those education programs.
Lower Murray Water	Provide education on sustainable water use and their services.
Parks Victoria	Provide environmental education resources and support for events.
Mallee Catchment Management Authority	Provide environmental education resources and support for events.
Sustainability Victoria	Facilitate state-wide sustainability education campaigns and provide resources.
Sunraysia Sustainability Network	Promote sustainable living and facilitate community involvement in the Mildura Eco Village.
AroundAgain	Provide information on their service and support sustainability events.

Stakeholder	Role
Aboriginal Cultural Heritage educators	Provide Cultural Heritage education.
Greening Mildura	Promote sustainability events and facilitate community involvement in tree-related activities.
Mildura Rural City Council	Provide educational programs and resources to the community relating to energy, water, waste and biodiversity, and our services in these areas.

5. Key Areas

5.1. Energy

As a leader in the community, Council strives to set an example of responsible environmental management. In 2007 Council developed a Greenhouse Action Plan (GAP) to address rising energy usage and associated greenhouse gas emissions and identified a goal of reducing emissions by 20 per cent by the year 2011/12. Through the implementation of actions in the GAP, Council attained a reduction in emissions of 20.2 per cent by 2012. An evaluation of the GAP led to improved energy efficiency actions which were detailed in the *Energy Management Plan 2013-2017* (EMP).

The development of the *Energy Management Plan 2017-2021* involved a review of the previous plan and identification of actions to build on the achievements of the previous plans. This document considers additional risk areas associated with increasing energy prices. In addition to the environmental benefits of reducing emissions, a reduction in energy consumption will lead to a reduction in financial costs to Council, as well as reducing corporate and operational risks.

The objectives of the EMP 2017-2021 are to:

- Achieve a 25 per cent reduction from 2015-16 electricity consumption in buildings and facilities by 2022
- Achieve a 15 per cent reduction from 2015-16 electricity consumption of street/public lighting by 2022
- Achieve a 10 per cent reduction from 2015-16 fuel consumption by 2022.
- Record financial savings generated by energy efficiency projects.
- Record emission reduction from reduced energy consumption.
- Develop and foster an understanding of 'energy efficiency' and increase the participation of Council staff and the community to reduce energy consumption.
- Develop partnerships between Council, local business, neighbouring councils, education facilities and community groups to establish a collaborative approach towards energy conservation.
- Enhance and further promote the culture of energy saving practices in Council.

In achieving further reductions in energy consumption, Council will prioritise actions that require little to no capital investment to achieve gains, including reducing energy use through behavioural change and efficient management of existing assets.

Water and energy consumption in Council's *Buildings and Facilities Policy* and *Water and Energy Use Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities* provide a framework and guidance to those involved with Council buildings and facilities to achieve environmentally sustainable outcomes.

5.2. Water

The Murray River is one of the most significant natural resources within the Mildura Rural City Council. The quality of water in the Murray River has direct economic, social and environmental implications for local communities and downstream users. Water is a limited resource and education on the conservation of water and maintenance of supply quality is essential to our environment.

Lower Murray Water has implemented water restrictions designed to reduce potable water wastage in this dry environment and therefore enable water to continue to be available for high-value uses. MRCC has implemented water recycling projects and is using recycled water for sports ground irrigation and road construction works. There are also many steps that households can take to conserve water, as well as options for reusing greywater and installing rainwater tanks, all of which are actively promoted by Council.

Stormwater run-off is a significant source of pollution to our waterways and is another major front for education and community involvement. In urban areas, stormwater contaminants can include garden waste, pet faeces, detergents, cigarette butts, and other litter. Stormwater management is concerned with improving the water quality of stormwater run-off before it outfalls into receiving waters. Council's *Environmental Management Strategy for Stormwater* was created as part of an overall drainage strategy.

Council is currently treating stormwater using gross pollutant traps and constructed wetlands. Gross pollutant traps have been installed at 12 locations in the Mildura region to collect rubbish before it outfalls into receiving waters. Constructed wetlands (such as the Etiwanda Wetlands) act as a natural filter improving water quality through biological and chemical processes. They also provide habitat for a range of plants and animals and support passive recreation.

Council is also committed to raising awareness in the community on all aspects of stormwater management, including increasing the understanding of waterway pollution problems associated with litter and other harmful contaminants.

5.3. Waste

Council provides a wide range of waste management services to our community. These services assist residents, visitors and businesses to responsibly dispose of the waste they produce, to extend the life of local landfills and improve the sustainability of our environment.

The waste management services that Council provides include:

- The provision of kerbside garbage and recycling collection, and in 2020 an organics collection, to approximately 54,500 residents and businesses across the municipality.
- Management of two operating landfills, two closed landfills and seven transfer stations providing access to all residents to be able to dispose of waste and recycling where possible.
- Undertaking routine and emergency street sweeping.
- Servicing street litter bins and public place recycling bins.
- Collection of illegal dumping, dead animals and syringes.
- The provision of garbage and recycling bins for events.

Mildura landfill is the Victorian Environment Protection Authority (EPA) licensed site where Council accepts the highest volume of waste to landfill and recycling in the municipality. MRCC accepts a large variety of waste and recycling including green waste, timber, steel, tyres, polystyrene, commingled recycling, mattresses, oil, electronic waste, asbestos, clean-fill, contaminated C-class soil, and cardboard.

AroundAgain also diverts waste from landfill and is the second-hand retail shop at Mildura landfill. AroundAgain is run by the Christie Centre, a not-for-profit organisation chartered with supporting, educating and employing adults with a disability.

There are two recycling programs run by other organisations that are hosted by Council at the Mildura landfill and other regional sites. These include drumMUSTER that collect and recycle agricultural drums and *Detox Your Home* (DYH) run by Sustainability Victoria with collection and recycling through ToxFree. *Detox Your Home* host a mobile DYH where household chemicals are collected once a year at the landfill, and a permanent site that accepts paint (through the paint back program), household batteries and fluorescent tubes, to divert these harmful products from landfill.

To reduce the amount of material going directly to landfill, education around the services we provide, and what can and cannot be recycled, including advising the best way to recycle. With the introduction of the *Food Organics and Garden Organics* (FOGO) service, education efforts will continue to focus on building community capacity and knowledge, to reduce the amount of organics waste to landfill and contaminated recycling.

A large proportion of waste education is undertaken by the Loddon Mallee Waste and Resource Recovery Group (LMWRRG) who are a Statutory Authority established under the *Environment Protection Act 1970*. Objectives of the LMWRRG include educating businesses and communities to reduce waste going to landfill, by efficiently using waste and resource recovery infrastructure and services.

5.4. Biodiversity

A key area of Council's Environmental Education Plan is to promote biodiversity and raise awareness of its importance. Biodiversity is the variety of all living things that inhabit the earth, including plants, animals, fungi, micro-organisms, and bacteria.

The municipality of MRCC represents more than 60 per cent of the Victorian Mallee area. The Mallee region is well known for its unique and extensive bushland areas forming our local environment, including the Murray River Corridor, various National Parks and a number of bushland and crown

reserves. All of these environments differ in dimension and species (plants, animals etc.) across the landscape.

Our local environment is where we all live, work and play. Understanding and promoting biodiversity within our local community is important due to the service that it provides. Sustainable and diverse environments provide direct benefits such as soil conservation, air, and water quality, habitat availability and temperature control. These direct benefits support the community by providing recreation and tourism areas, as well as providing aesthetically pleasing native bushlands to be enjoyed.

Existing threats and ongoing pressure on biodiversity within the municipality is primarily due to existing and changing land use and development. These include expanding irrigation and urbanisation, dryland farming, infrastructure development and negative recreational activities. These industries and activities result in various threats to biodiversity including habitat loss and fragmentation, the introduction of invasive plant and animal species, erosion, salinity and declining water quality.

Working with, providing education to and raising awareness in the community, Council aims to provide a healthy balance between protecting the natural environment, permitting recreational use of these areas and supporting the local economy. Council will continue to implement a range of biodiversity programs that involve a wide cross section of government organisations, local schools, and the wider community. External funding and collaborative efforts will also be pursued to implement on-ground works and assist in the future protection of our environmental assets.

6. The Mildura Eco Village

The Mildura Eco Village is the product of community consultation led by a community group, Sunraysia Sustainability Network (SSN), with the support of the MRCC and Christie Centre. It is a staged program to assist the Sunraysia community to move toward a more sustainable future.

Facilities

Education Centre

The Education Centre is a multi-purpose community facility displaying sustainable design elements, building practices and technologies. The Centre is used to showcase sustainable building and energy and water efficiency to the local community. It is accessible to the public and has been designed to be used as a meeting space and to deliver/participate in a range of educational experiences.

Community Garden

The community garden is the heart and soul of the Mildura Eco Village. It is a place where community members can grow their own produce in their own garden plot, as well as a place to volunteer and learn. The community garden currently has 37 raised garden beds and large on-ground beds for community use.

Eco House

This project involved the removal, re-stumping and refurbishment of an older style house to create the Sustainable Demonstration (Eco) House. The refurbished Eco House has been redesigned and subsequently retrofitted with a range of energy and water saving features, to be used as a demonstration facility. The Eco House is used to showcase sustainable living in the Mildura community, including for school education tours.

Education Opportunities

The Mildura Eco Village is a holistic learning site covering the sustainability themes of energy, waste, biodiversity, water and sustainable living. Education programs are delivered in collaboration with the Mildura landfill and AroundAgain.

Community education and awareness is an important part of the service and opportunities offered at the site. Programs tailored to specific age groups ensure a high standard of educational outcomes across all demographics, some with a focus on youth.

The infrastructure and activities at the site develop skills and knowledge about sustainability and the local environment. The site allows hands-on experience and includes real world training designed to engage and motivate the community in environmental education. The site also encourages the community to explore ideas about how to live more sustainably and understand the balance of resource efficiency within our community.

Opportunities for Community Participation

The Sunraysia Sustainability Network (SSN) engage and educate the surrounding community of Sunraysia to live and work sustainably and within their means, and to conserve and better manage our resources. The SSN aims to engage, collaborate and interact with different organisations to encompass a diverse community for social cohesion through sustainability actions.

The Mildura Eco Village aims to provide an area for the community to come together and share ideas, as well as encourage a positive and lasting influence on community attitudes to move towards more sustainable ways of living.

7. Action Plan

The Environmental Education Plan aims to provide an integrated approach to environmental education by targeting three main groups; children and youth, community and Council employees (staff).

Target Group	Goal	Action	Responsibility	Timeframe
Children and Youth	Increase awareness of environmental sustainability in young people.	In conjunction with the SSN and partnering organisations, develop and support the implementation of an education program based at the Mildura Eco Village for children and youth of various ages.	CF	Year 1, revise annually
		Design a series of packaged educational resources and lesson plans for key environmental sites within the municipality (e.g. Mildura Eco Village, Etiwanda Wetlands and Lake Ranfurly).	CF	Year 1 and Year 2, revise annually
		Distribute information and promote opportunities about the environmental education program to all schools throughout the municipality.	CF	Quarterly
		Undertake 50 school/community group visits/tours/activities on environmental sustainability.	CF, PAWS	Annually
		Provide an evaluation form to all schools who have completed an environmental education activity.	CF, PAWS	Annually
		Provide information resources on energy, water, waste and biodiversity to schools that enquire about environmental education.	CF, PAWS	Annually
	Engage with new schools.	Engage with at least two new schools annually at the Mildura Eco Village.	CF	Annually
Community	Increase community awareness on environmental sustainability.	Coordinate with other government agencies to develop a booklet covering what people can do in their own home – energy, water, waste, and biodiversity.	CF	Year 1 and Year 2, revise annually
		Deliver a targeted information session to at least three community groups.	CF	Annually
		Attend at least two events to distribute information on environmental sustainability.	CF	Annually

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Target Group	Goal	Action	Responsibility	Timeframe
		Develop an annual calendar of events and delivery plan for all sustainability related events and campaigns.	CF, PAWS	Annually
		Research and develop educational material on Ecological Sustainable Design (ESD) for the community.	CF	Year 1 and Year 2, revise annually
		Raise awareness on the urban heat island effect through the implementation of a neighbourhood/street-based cool it greening program.	CF, PAWS	Annually
		Develop and implement a program to increase community appreciation towards trees in urban areas.	CF	Annually
		Develop and implement a program to increase community awareness about climate change adaptation.	CF	Annually
	Increase community participation in sustainable living events and activities.	Hold at least one major event at the Mildura Eco Village about sustainable living.	CF	Annually
		Promote uptake of community garden beds at the Mildura Eco Village at least twice a year (if beds are available).	CF	Annually
		Support the SSN to investigate a community sustainability competition/awards program.	CF	Every 2 Years
		Develop an Environmental Sustainability e-newsletter including information on sustainable living, and Council and community projects and events.	CF	6 monthly
	Increase community group participation in environmental sustainability initiatives.	Support community groups by attending at least 10 community group meetings to provide information on environmental sustainability and current initiatives and programs.	CF, PAWS	Annually
		Support the SSN to develop and implement a program of community sustainability events and information sessions based at the Mildura Eco Village.	CF	Annually
		Support Greening Mildura to increase participation in community-based revegetation events and provide support and education on drought-tolerant plants suitable for our area.	CF, PAWS	Annually

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Target Group	Goal	Action	Responsibility	Timeframe
Staff	Ensure new staff are aware of Council's commitment to environmental sustainability.	Provide resource-wise inductions to all new staff as part of Council's induction program.	CF	Bi-annually
	Increase staff awareness about environmental sustainability.	Provide information to staff on sustainable waste management practices.	PAWS	Annually
		Conduct bin audits at Madden, MAC, Ouyen, Deakin, The Alfred Deakin Centre, Information Technology Building, Benetook Depot and Red Cliffs Depot.	PAWS	Annually
		Develop a staff newsletter on environmental sustainability including waste, biodiversity and energy and water conservation.	CF, PAWS	Monthly
		Develop a program to educate parks maintenance staff to develop skills in recognising plants and water requirements (when to water and how much).	PAWS	Annually
		Implement efficient water management practices for turf and gardens to be used by Parks Services staff.	CF, PAWS	Annually
		Report urban and rural water usage against targets at monthly Parks Team meetings.	PAWS	Monthly
		Develop a program to increase staff awareness about reducing energy and water consumption including energy use efficiency, irrigation and water use efficiency, and Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD).	CF	Annually
		Develop a program to educate staff about Environmental Risk Management.	CF, PAWS	Annually
		Develop a program to increase staff awareness about climate change adaptation.	CF	Annually

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CF – Community Futures

PAWS – Parks and Waste Services