

## Sustainable Cities 2011 - Victoria

**Recipient:** City of Yarra      **Pop:** approx 78 000

**Location:** 5kms east of Melbourne

**Category:** Community Action & Partnerships

### Highlights:

YARRA City Council's engagement with the community is founded on a commitment to empower local residents to build a more liveable, diverse and sustainable municipality. This approach includes facilitating key learning networks, running free training for community groups, funding nine neighbourhood houses and integrating community engagement into key policies and strategies.

Council's community grants program plays a powerful community strengthening role, giving groups the opportunity to develop projects that address a self-identified need and the resources to address those needs themselves, bringing their local community along with them. As funded projects are community-managed, they also build skills among the community organisations and their volunteers, increasing the social return on investment. Examples of outstanding projects include:

**Cultivating Community** – a locally based organisation promoting and supporting development of community gardening projects and environmentally sustainable food production systems.

**Napier Studio** – initiated as a 'whole of community' approach to graffiti, incorporating people concerned about graffiti and young people putting it there.

**Holden Street Neighbourhood House:** As well as running many programs that support the local community, Holden Street Neighbourhood House, assisted by Council, retrofitted its residential building to be an eco demonstration house. Jointly with Council they have produced a brochure of sustainability initiatives and run open house days for the public relating to solar panels, water tanks, passive heating system, skylights and more.

Another strong connection with community action is the community engagement component of the **YARRA Environmental Strategy**. That Strategy commits the Council to:

- Engaging and empowering the community in environmental sustainability;
- Developing, promoting and facilitating community-based solutions to sustainability; and
- Establishing partnerships with local service providers and funding organisations to conduct targeted programs for sustainable living.

In 2010 Council initiated the **YARRA Sustainability Awards** and has recognised schools, children's centres, community groups, businesses and individuals for their contributions annually. A great example of Community Action and Partnerships was local resident Alby Clark who expanded his own small garden into a community plot for himself and his neighbours on the Collingwood Estate and then supported others to enable people to get together and share ideas, seedlings and food.

**Category:** 'Dame Phyllis Frost' Litter Prevention

### Highlights:

YARRA City Council committed to working with Sustainability Victoria, Melbourne Water and surrounding Councils to develop the Lower YARRA Litter Strategy (LYLS). The strategy was a collaborative approach to prevent litter entering waterways and to initiate waterway improvement. This partnership resulted in a multi-faceted approach to integrated regional litter management, including structural works, education and enforcement.

Flagship projects in the Strategy focus on areas of high litter generation, such as YARRA's popular shopping and commercial areas. YARRA completed the intensive implementation of the Victoria Street Litter Prevention project that highlighted that a preventative approach is necessary in order to address issues at all of YARRA's litter hotspots and this led to the establishment of YARRA's Litter Task Force.

The Litter Task Force included staff of all levels from the Environmental Sustainability Unit and, after establishing a good understanding of what Council wanted to achieve, partnered with Melbourne Water, EPA, Sustainability Victoria, Victorian Litter Action Alliance and City West Water to assist in undertaking these actions.

Some of the Taskforce's initiatives include:



**Infrastructure review** - A review of bins and other street furniture along Brunswick and Smith Streets to maximise responsible litter behaviour.

**Butt pole placement** – Trialling the new placement of butt poles higher up on bins rather than on the side of the bin to increase their visibility and therefore effectiveness.

**Event management** – This includes increased bin collections at events, promoting the ‘Don’t be a Tosser campaign’, anti-littering messaging on metcards, etc.

**Streetscape Improvement** – Examples include Post Office Lane that involved increased enforcements, reduced litter and a street art project.

**Category: Resource Recovery & Waste Management**

**Highlights:**

YARRA City Council has adopted a five-year Waste Management Plan which sets out actions that Council will take to increase the amount of materials being recycled, to expand local composting programs and to increase community awareness about waste diversion options. The Waste Management Plan includes an extensive list of actions to achieve its objectives.

Council already has in place a number of initiatives aimed at waste reduction and recycling but is looking to further develop programs and recycling opportunities. Council’s research has shown that the domestic waste bin still contains items which are recyclable and which could be diverted out of the waste stream.

A recent focus has been on further removing recyclables and organic waste from garbage bins. Council encourages people through promotion to use compost bins and worm farms at home to further reduce their waste. Due to households having limited space, a neighbourhood based compost centres in a variety of locations have been utilised to enable these households to compost. Other initiatives include the Neighbourhood Orchard Program and *Compost Mates* to further try and reduce organic waste.

*Compost Mates* began as a small pilot program funded through YARRA’s Grants Program and has grown into an inspiring volunteer model for local communities to ‘close the loop’ between food growing and food waste. Four community-minded local cafes partnered with their own local ‘compost mate’ to save kitchen peelings, eggshells and coffee grounds in special bins. Rostered ‘compost mates’ then collect the full bins in their bicycle panniers or shopping jeeps, taking the compostables home to become valuable soil conditioner.

If all of the actions from YARRA’s Waste Management Plan are effectively implemented, it is predicted that the amount of garbage collected and disposed at landfill will reduce by 26 kilograms per person per year, while the quantity of materials being recycled will increase by 24 kilograms per person per year. This outcome would result in an increased diversion on current levels of waste going to landfill of 12%, lifting the current diversion rate from 45% to an estimated 57%.

**Category: Environmental Innovation & Protection**

**Highlights:**

The YARRA River is one of the key elements defining the municipality and is one of its most important natural assets. The YARRA has gone from a forgotten and maligned system, to one revered by residents and crucial to local biodiversity. Council has undertaken many initiatives to clean up and bring people and biodiversity back to this unique resource.

The community has formed its own groups which focus on preserving and beautifying the municipality’s river, creeks, and parks. Established groups in YARRA include the Merri Creek Management Committee and Darebin Creek Management Committee, both supported by Council, various Friends Associations together with Council being involved in Landcare and Waterwatch programs.

**Street Trees** - Being a densely developed inner-city municipality, Council understands the benefits of urban forests in mitigating against urban heat island effect and contributing to local biodiversity. Council has a comprehensive program to plant 800 – 1000 street trees each year which also improves local amenity and liveability, and maintains approximately 21 000 street trees in total. Limited space, and few nature strips requires an innovative response and strong community consultation around issues such as loss of parking. Street trees are planted according to Water Sensitive Urban Design principles wherever possible to filter stormwater and reduce waterway pollution.

**Main YARRA Trail** - An innovative approach to open space design and waste minimisation was employed during the recent upgrade to the Main YARRA Trail, which encourages walking and cycling. A zero waste outcome was achieved through collaboration with designers and contractors. The old path was crushed and compacted to form the sub-grade for the new trail, recycling approximately 345 cubic metres of asphalt, which could have ended up in landfill.

**Dights Falls Restoration** - Melbourne Water is completing works to replace the 100 years old Dights Falls Weir. The new weir will be similar to the existing structure, for heritage reasons, and a new fishway will allow fish to swim upstream, benefiting 11 species of native migratory fish.

**YARRA Riverkeeper Association** is a community organisation formed in 2004 to protect and restore the YARRA River and its tributaries. The group is a leader in understanding and advocating for the YARRA River, and researching river management, water supply, conservation and recycling and pollution control. The riverkeepers have provided on-water inspection tours to over 200 community and political leaders and delivered over 300 presentations.

**Sustainable Design Assessment in the Planning Process (SDAPP)** - In early 2011, Council launched SDAPP to ensure all planning applications include consistent environmental performance considerations to achieve more sustainable outcomes and long-term community benefits. Staff have undergone extensive ESD training, becoming advocates for sustainable design and negotiating for improvement of applications. SDAPP is now being introduced by Councils across Victoria and YARRA's Sustainable Design Advisor will present the program design and learnings at the World Sustainable Building Conference in Helsinki in October 2011. An ESD Local Policy has also been developed and submitted to the Minister for Planning for approval and inclusion in the YARRA Planning Scheme.

**Sustainable Transport** - YARRA's vision is to create a city which is accessible people of all levels of personal mobility and where a fulfilling life can be had without the need for a car. Council has formalised a road user hierarchy that the local road network should prioritise pedestrians, cyclists, public transport, freight, motorcycles and lastly cars in all transportation works. This year Council has budgeted to spend \$1.9M on bike infrastructure, for upgrades to off-road shared paths for recreation, on-road paths for commuters, behavioural change programs, and improved end of trip facilities.

**Category: Water Conservation**

**Highlights:**

Council's water strategy has focused on reducing water consumption in the community and internal operations, as well as improving stormwater quality. In 2008 Council set targets to reduce water consumption by 40% by 2015, exceeded in 2009/10 through a 49% reduction.

**Building retrofits** - Council has implemented many water conservation initiatives into its existing and new buildings, including rainwater tanks at more than 15 sites and trialled innovative systems such as a greywater recycling at the new Burnley pavilion. The water is collected from showers and used to flush toilets and irrigate the oval and surrounds. An interpretation panel explains this initiative to the community.

**Leisure centres** - Since 2008 over 51 separate environmental initiatives have been implemented at YARRA Leisure centres, which has saved over 584 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e and 5 950 kilolitres of water.

**Parks and Gardens** - YARRA's parks are a key community resource for sports, recreation, local amenity and biodiversity. Activities to reduce potable water use have included:

- computerised irrigation which use rain sensors to improve efficiency;
- providing re-claimed mulch to maintain moisture in garden beds, and free to the community;
- planting drought tolerant grass species for sports fields;
- undertaking an extensive soil decompaction and aeration program; and
- using recycled water from the Werribee waste treatment plant to water parks and gardens.

**Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD)** - Council and Melbourne Water have developed WSUD guidelines to help residents, developers and Council. WSUD treatments stop litter from reaching waterways, filter pollutants before entering the stormwater pipes on their way to waterways and passively water street trees and other plantings.

Council has constructed street raingardens as a part of an ongoing WSUD program since 2008, as well as the award-winning Smith Street bioretention tree pits. Council designed an innovative system to direct stormwater runoff into a 'treatment train' of bioretention pits. The pits remove contaminants before stormwater enters the drainage system, improving the streetscape amenity and passively irrigating the trees.

Council is nearing completion, with support of Melbourne Water, of a raingarden in the historic Edinburgh Gardens. This major initiative will improve the health of waterways downstream by filtering pollutants from stormwater, and capture water for reuse. The raingarden design will form a landscape feature in YARRA's most heavily used open space and make the stormwater treatment process visible to the public.

**Community** - Council promotes all these activities to the community as well as running campaigns and programs to assist the community to reduce water.

**Category: Energy Innovation**

**Highlights:**

Council looks to lead by example in dealing with climate change and energy issues. Examples include:

**Buildings** - Council has undertaken building retrofits aimed towards the target of reducing energy by 30% by 2012. Actions have retrofitted lighting and air conditioning, as well trialling voltage optimisation units.

**Streetlights** - Streetlights make up nearly 50% of total greenhouse emissions. After two successful trials, Council devised an innovative tendering methodology which allowed a cost effective bulk changeover of Mercury Vapour lights to efficient T5 lights, one of the first Victorian Councils to do so. This has saved approx 1 500 tonnes of CO2 pa.

**Fleet/ Employee Commute** - Council has trialled hybrid vehicles and has a comprehensive program to get more staff travelling and commuting more sustainably – with electric bikes and share bikes to travel between town halls and free fleet bikes for staff who ride a bike regularly for work purposes.

**Financing Sustainability Actions** - In 2008 Council developed the Adaptive Assets program whereby Council will implement any actions that have a less than 10 year payback. An annual fund has been made available for implementation of many smaller actions, with larger ones funded through the annual capital works program. To support this program Council has employed Australia's first Greenhouse Accounting Officer in Local Government.

**Renewable Energy Generation** - Council has a target to generate 10% of energy from low carbon sources locally by 2012. It has installed solar electric panels on 13 sites, one of largest distributions of solar PV in Victorian local government, and has installed sustainable hot water on 8 sites. Council is also installing cogeneration units to produce low-carbon electricity from natural gas and 'free' by-product hot water at two leisure centres this year.

**Carbon Neutral** - Council purchases 80% GreenPower for electricity and offsets for other emissions, and will purchase 100% for 2011/12 to become one of the first carbon neutral Councils in Australia.

**Sustainable Small Facilities (SSF) program** – Council conceptualised and ran this pilot program with a neighbouring Council to consistently assess and benchmark the sustainability of Council's smaller sites, undertake basic retrofits during assessment, and submit larger actions for future funding.

Council also supports the community in energy efficient approaches. Examples include:

**YARRA Environment Community Consultative Committee** – This Committee meets quarterly to provide feedback to Council to guide YARRA's environmental programs and policies, and for members to report back to their networks.

**Towards Zero Net Emissions (tZNE)** - YARRA led the development of tZNE, an innovative regional strategy involving nine municipalities. Endorsed by all Councils, with many joint actions, tZNE aims to achieve significant reductions in carbon emissions, across 25% of Greater Melbourne's population.

**Delivering Clean Energy Solutions (DCES)** - Yarra is a key participant in DCES, a Council supported community bulk buy program offering energy efficient, high quality and cost effective clean energy solutions for homes.

**Energy Saver – it all starts at home** - Developed by YARRA and Melbourne Councils to target State and Federal energy efficiency free retrofit programs and subsidies to the door of local residents.

**CitySwitch** - YARRA is a partner in the national CitySwitch energy efficiency program. Signatories commit to an accredited 4 stars or higher NABERS Energy tenancy or whole building rating.

**Energise Business** - With over 9 000 small to medium enterprises Council has undertaken many programs to support them. YARRA piloted Energise Business which developed a methodology to reduce barriers and increase uptake.

**Category: Heritage & Culture**

**Highlights:**

For 40 000 odd years before European settlement, the area now known as Fitzroy belonged to the Wurundjeri. From the 1920's onwards, Fitzroy became the thriving hub of Aboriginal Victoria – the known meeting place for linking in with family, the rallying point for political activism and the birthplace for many important Aboriginal organisations. YARRA City Council has an ongoing commitment to honouring this history, raising awareness within the non-Aboriginal community and ensuring Aboriginal community connections to the area are maintained. YARRA Council initiates, supports and funds a range of events, publications, consultations, history projects and support networks.

Highlights include:

**The Dirty Mile** - YARRA sponsored 'The Dirty Mile' by Ilbijerri Theatre, a promenade style theatrical production that took audiences on a tour of Gertrude Street and surrounds.

**The Aboriginal History of Fitzroy Project** - Sixteen plaques mark significant buildings and sites, and a map enables people to take a self-guided tour and learn more about the area. Quality documentation featuring positive imagery of the Aboriginal community is just one way to undermine racism and increase cultural awareness.

**Melbourne Aboriginal Youth, Sport and Recreation (MAYSAR)** - Council provides \$50 000 p.a. to a nutrition and activities program for some of the most disadvantaged members of YARRA's community, the 'Parkies'. Working with the 'Parkies' is just one aspect of MAYSAR's holistic and inclusive approach to community health and well being.

**The Abbotsford Convent** – on the grounds of the former Convent of the Good Shepherd and surrounding buildings, the site has become an arts, education and tourism precinct on a unique heritage site. This followed a campaign by local residents, Council and community groups to return it to the community and prevent it being turned into an apartment complex. The Convent now hosts artist studios, therapy practices, community spaces, restaurants and café's, and hosts many community markets and performances.

**Victoria Park Redevelopment Project** - Council is undertaking a \$7 million redevelopment of the historic Victoria Park oval and grandstands to open the space for the community, preserve its heritage and incorporate sustainable design and public art.

**Category: Young Legends**

**Highlights:**

Examples of initiatives that connect Council and community include:

**Resource Smart Schools** - YARRA City Council has paid for schools to be facilitated through the Resource Smart Schools – a personal development teacher-based program which integrates sustainability education into primary and secondary school curriculums. Participation helps schools reduce waste, save money and provide real life learning applications for students.

**YARRA's Children's Services** - Council's Children's Services staff have implemented a diverse range of sustainability initiatives, including energy and water saving infrastructure, a green cleaning program, a behaviour change program, and participate in the YARRA Environmental Sustainability Network.

**Collingwood Children's Farm** - Formed in 1980, the Farm gives children living in an urban environment, often without backyards, the chance to learn to care for animals and nature and also have fun outdoors. Council also funds the Young Farmers Program which engages young people, 8-16year olds, from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds within YARRA to develop social skills, build self-esteem, develop fine motor skills, and engage with the whole family in the program. The Farm also hosts cultural events, and has a community garden for local residents.

**Melbourne Girls College (MGC)** - is aiming to become carbon neutral. MGC was the first Victorian government school to install pedal powered student-energy generators, which complements their existing solar power array. In 2011, MGC hosted the world's first 100% carbon neutral, outdoor moonlight cinema which was completely pedal powered. Over the past 5 years students, supported by Council's Heritage Officer, have planted over 2 000 indigenous plants, stabilised the river bank, removed weeds, built and installed almost 200 bird and bat nesting boxes, and established connections with traditional land owners.

**The Eco-Cubby Project** - teachers of the University of Melbourne Early Learning Centre placed children at the centre of the design of an eco-cubby to demonstrate sustainable building practices. Values associated with sustainability were explored through active experiential learning in a fun, collaborative, challenging and creative way.