

# Environmental Engagement Action Plan

2024-2028



Mildura Rural City Council

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## 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.



## 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 endorsing the community owned and led *Community Climate Response Plan 2024-2029*.

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 and creating a circular economy.

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 for 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 plan.

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



## Our Region

Located in north west Victoria, the Mildura Rural City Council area covers almost ten per cent of the state.

The region's landscape includes unique Mallee vegetation, broad acre grain properties, extensive horticultural farms, and vibrant towns.

Mildura Rural City Council shares borders with New South Wales and South Australia, which makes it a strategically important regional service centre for three states.

The beautiful Murray River winds its way through much of the municipality and is a focal point for visitors and those who call the region home.

## Our Vision

The *Community Vision 2021-2040* and the *Council Plan 2021-2025* are Council's primary strategic planning documents. Council is dedicated to implementing both plans with a commitment to 'Environmental Sustainability'.

### Community Vision 2021-2040

*"We will sustain and enhance our natural environment and resources for current and future generations".*

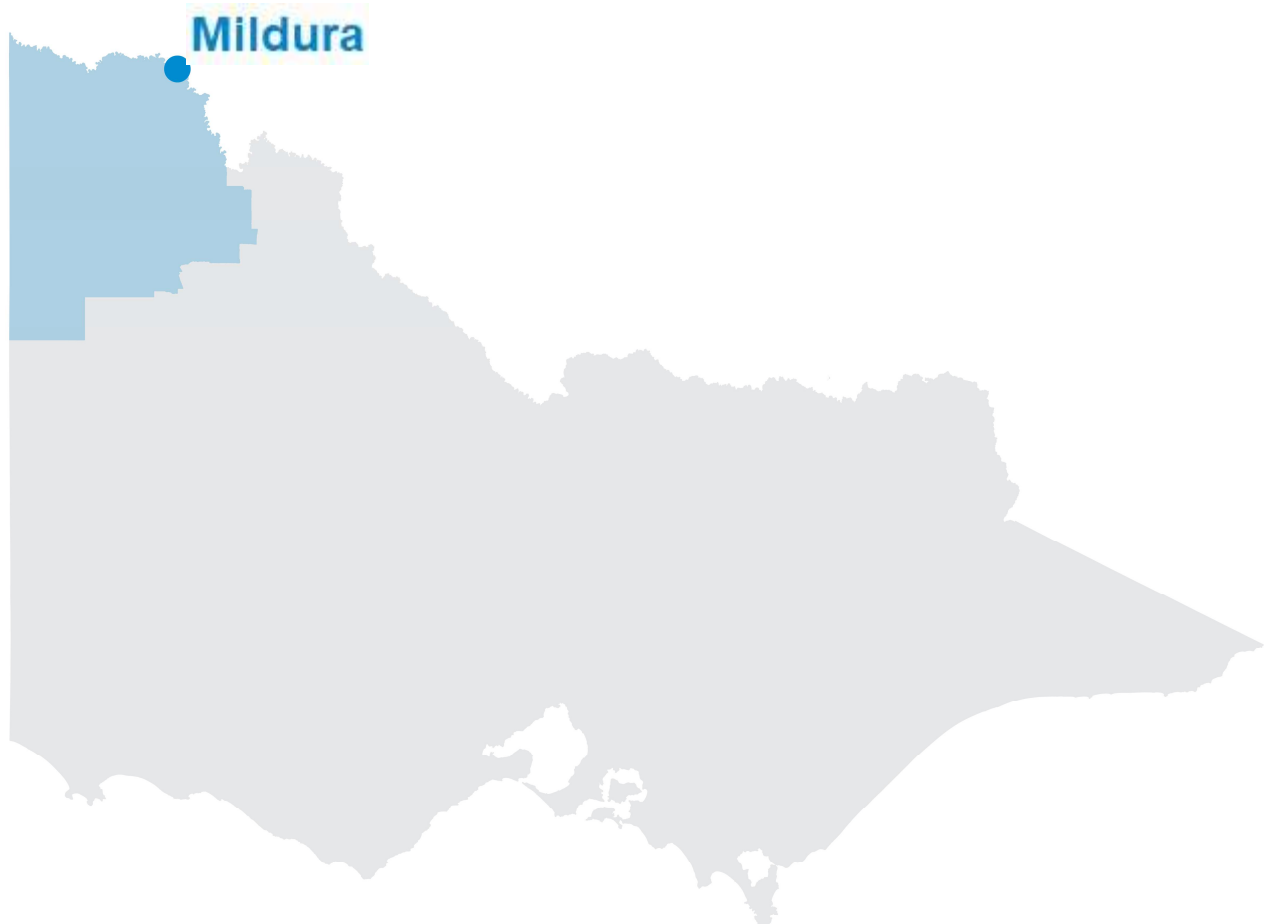
### Council Plan 2021-2025

*"We will sustain our natural environment and resources for current and future generations".*

### Outcomes

*"A community that actively addresses the causes and impacts of climate change".*

*"Increased community knowledge, skills and action to live sustainably".*



## Purpose of the Plan

The Environmental Engagement Action 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 environmental education activities throughout the community.

Council aims to promote environmental awareness through a range of communication methods while supporting community action and behavioural changes towards sustainable living. Council plans to implement an integrated education program that covers key areas of energy conservation, waste management, biodiversity, and water conservation.

## Background

Council has been undertaking environmental education for many years. Previous documents that demonstrate Council's commitment to environmental education include the *Environmental Awareness Strategy 2007-2012*, *Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2012-2015*, and *Environmental Education Plan 2015-2019 and 2020-2024*.

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, use less natural resources, produce less waste and reduce energy and water consumption.



## Existing Plans, Strategies, Policies and Guidelines

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

- Native Vegetation and Pest Management Plan 2024-2028
- Towards Zero Emissions Strategy 2021-2050
- Waste and Resource Recovery Strategy 2022-2026
- Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Policy
- Water and Energy Use Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities
- Water and Energy Consumption in Council Buildings and Facilities Policy
- Water Management Policy
- Wetland Management Guidelines
- Community Climate Response Plan 2024-2029
- Native Vegetation Policy.

## 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
Recycling Victoria	Recycling Victoria provides leadership and oversight of waste and resource recovery services to support the circular economy.
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	EPA work to prevent and reduce the harmful effect of pollution and waste on Victoria's environment and people. EPA work with community, industry and businesses.
Lower Murray Water	Provide education on sustainable water use and their services.
Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA)	Facilitate state-wide sustainability education campaigns and provide resources.
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.
First People of the Millewa Mallee	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.

Stakeholder	Role
Climate Emergency Community Advisory Group (CECAG)	Promote sustainability and climate change events and facilitate community involvement in climate change related activities and actions.
Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance	Lead and support collaborative action to decrease greenhouse gas emissions and increase the resilience of the region’s communities through innovative projects, advocacy and knowledge sharing.
Cities Power Partnership	Network of Australian councils leading the way to a thriving, zero emissions future.
Climate Emergency Australia	Network of Australian councils that have declared a climate emergency.

## Key Areas

### Climate Change

Climate change poses a significant threat to Australians. Victoria’s climate is becoming warmer and drier, which is projected to have negative consequences for health infrastructure, agriculture, water, and biodiversity. The impacts of climate change affect all areas of the council's responsibility. The Mallee is exposed to a range of climate risks, including extreme heat, fire, and changes in rainfall patterns and storms, which lead to floods and droughts.

Predictions for the Mallee include:

- Maximum and minimum daily temperatures will continue to increase.
- By 2030, increases in daily temperature of 0.8 to 1.6°C are expected.
- Rainfall will continue to be very variable over time. Average rainfall over the long term is expected to decline.
- Extreme rainfall events are expected to become more intense on average.

This plan builds on and supports the work completed by the Climate Emergency Community Advisory Group (CECAG) and the Community Climate Response Plan to mitigate and adapt to climate change within our community.





## Energy

Council has been actively involved in reducing emissions and energy use since 2007, with the introduction of the *Greenhouse Action Plan 2007-2012* and the subsequent *Energy Management Plans 2012-2017 and 2017-2021*. Actions within those plans included installing photovoltaic (PV) systems on Council buildings and street lighting and facility upgrades, all contributing to past emissions reductions and meeting the targets of the previous plans.

Council's *Towards Zero Emissions Strategy 2021-2050* outlines our approach to achieving zero net emissions by no later than 2050.

The strategy outlines priority areas to achieve this target by reducing carbon emissions associated with Council's services, operations, and infrastructure. Zero net emissions for all priority areas, except landfill will be achieved by 2040, with zero net emissions being achieved by no later than 2050.

Council's *Water and Energy Consumption in Council 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.



## Water

The Murray River is a significant natural resource for southeastern Australia. The quality of water in the Murray River has direct economic, social, and environmental implications for our local communities and downstream users. Water is a limited resource, and education on water conservation and maintenance of supply quality is essential to our environment.

Lower Murray Water has implemented permanent 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. Council 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 municipality 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 committed to raising community awareness of all aspects of stormwater management, including increasing understanding of waterway pollution problems.

## Biodiversity

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

Our municipality 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 bushland crown reserves and roadside vegetation corridors. These environments differ in dimension and species (plants, animals etc.) across the landscape.

Understanding and promoting biodiversity within our local community is important. 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 passive recreation and tourism, as well as providing aesthetically pleasing native bushlands to be enjoyed.

Existing threats and ongoing pressure on biodiversity within the municipality are 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.

By working with, providing education, and raising awareness in the community, Council aims to strike 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.



## Circular Economy and Waste

A circular economy aims to minimise the environmental impact of production and consumption by moving away from the traditional mindset of take, use, and throw away. By adopting a more efficient system, waste can be reduced, and the recycling and reuse of precious resources can be increased.

Council provides a wide range of waste management services to assist our community in responsibly disposing of waste. These services not only extend the life of local landfills but also improve the sustainability of our environment.

The waste management services that Council provides include:

- Kerbside garbage, recycling, organics and glass collection, to 54,500 residents and businesses across the municipality.
- Management of two operating landfills, two closed landfills, and seven transfer stations,
- Undertaking routine and emergency street sweeping.
- Servicing street litter bins and public place recycling bins.
- Collection of illegal dumping, dead animals, and syringes.
- 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.

Council accepts a large variety of waste and recycling, including green waste, steel, tyres, co-mingled recycling, mattresses, oil, electronic waste, asbestos, clean-fill, contaminated C and D 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 to support, educate, and employ adults with disabilities.

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, which collects and recycles agricultural drums, and Detox Your Home (DYH), run by Sustainability Victoria, with collection and recycling through ToxFree. *Detox Your Home* hosts 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 the landfill.

To reduce the amount of material going directly to landfill, council provides education about our services and what can and cannot be recycled. Education efforts will continue to focus on building community capacity and knowledge to reduce the amount of organic waste going to landfills and contaminated recycling.



## 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.

### 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 management 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 Climate Emergency Community Advisory Group are the community group responsible for implementing the *Community Climate Response Plan 2024-2028*. Council will support the group in implementing the actions to reduce and manage climate change impacts in our community.

## Action Plan

The Environmental Engagement Action 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.	Review education program based at the Mildura Eco Village for children and youth.	CP	Annually
		Distribute information and promote opportunities about the environmental education program to all schools throughout the municipality.	CP	Quarterly
		Undertake 50 school/community group visits/tours/activities on environmental sustainability.	CF, WS	Annually
		Seek feedback from schools that have completed an environmental education activity to inform improvement opportunities.	CP, WS	Annually
		Promote and deliver the School's Native Tree Program.	CP	Annually
		Provide information and resources to schools that enquire about environmental education.	CP, WS	Annually
		Engage with at least two new schools annually at the Mildura Eco Village.	CP	Annually
Community	Increase community awareness on environmental sustainability.	Revise the Sustainable Gardening Booklet in the Mildura region	CF, PR	Year 2
		Deliver two public events to raise awareness of drought tolerant plants and native vegetation.	CP	Annually
		Support public awareness programs and provide information on weeds at one market/event.	CP	Annually
		Deliver a community campaign to encourage responsible weed management in urban gardens.	CP	Annually
		Attend at least three events to distribute information on environmental sustainability.	CP, WS	Annually

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Target Group	Goal	Action	Responsibility	Timeframe
		Implement the Electrify Everything campaign to support households to electrify their homes.	CP	Annually
		Deliver the 'Cool It' street tree planting/greening program.	CP, PR	Annually
		Develop and implement a program to increase community appreciation of trees in urban areas.	CP	Annually
		Support the CECAG group in implementing the <i>Community Climate Response Plan 2024-2029</i> .	CP	Annually
		Revise the native vegetation clearing communication material and run campaigns to promote information.	CP	Annually
		Deliver four sustainable living workshops.	CP, WS	Annually
		Deliver an Electric Vehicle Showcase to provide residents with an opportunity to learn about electric vehicles.	CP	Annually
	Increase community group participation in environmental sustainability initiatives.	Hold at least one major event at the Mildura Eco Village about sustainable living.	CP	Annually
		Promote uptake of community garden beds at the Mildura Eco Village at least twice a year (if beds are available).	CP	Annually
		Develop an annual calendar of events and continue to promote and support Clean Up Australia Day, National Tree Day, World Environment Day and other environmental events.	CP, WS	Annually
		Support the SSN to develop and implement a program of community sustainability events and information sessions based at the Mildura Eco Village.	CP	Annually
		Support Greening Mildura by attending monthly meetings.	CP, PR	Annually

**Environmental Engagement Action Plan 2024-2028**

Target Group	Goal	Action	Responsibility	Timeframe
Staff	Ensure new staff are aware of Council's commitment to environmental sustainability.	Maintain and monitor staff induction training module: Climate Change and Local Government.	CP	Bi-annually
	Increase staff awareness about environmental sustainability.	Provide information to staff on sustainable waste management practices.	WS	Annually
		Develop and distribute a staff newsletter on environmental sustainability (Let's Talk Green).	CP, WS	Monthly
		Deliver a program for Parks and Gardens staff to develop skills in plant identification and water requirements (when to water and how much).	PR, WI	Annually
		Implement efficient water management practices for turf and gardens managed by Parks and Gardens staff.	PR	Annually
		Report urban and rural water usage against targets at monthly Parks and Gardens team meetings.	PR	Monthly

CP – Community Partnerships

WS – Waste Services

PR – Parks and Recreation

WI – Works and Infrastructure

## Trees are important because...

When trees are around I'm  
Happy. 😊



The trees attract  
the most beautiful  
wildlife.



I love to play in trees.



The trees make  
nature more beautiful  
and I couldn't live  
without them.



When trees  
produce oxygen  
it helps me when  
I'm scared.

