



YARRA CLIMATE ACTION NOW!
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Yarra Climate Action Now (YCAN) would like to submit the following comments and suggestions for the upcoming revision of the Yarra Environment Strategy. Thank you for the opportunity to present this submission.

General Comments

The City of Yarra's Environment Strategy is commendable and a lot of progress has been made. YCAN acknowledges that environmental targets are challenging and applauds City of Yarra for its commitment to the environment.

Having said that the issue of missed targets can be seen as an opportunity to consider what can be done better to achieve the goals set.

The City of Yarra should be proud of its achievements and leadership in the area of sustainability and environment, but rather than resting on its laurels, YCAN would like to see the City of Yarra set higher benchmarks for environmental goals.

Now is the time for environmental and sustainability issues to become core objectives. YCAN would like to see Councilors' and staff ceasing to view strategies such as the YES as "aspirational". There is no point in wasting ratepayers' money in the production of thick strategy documents, only to claim soon after that it was never intended that they be followed. Once the strategy has been worked out, adequate budget and human resources should be allocated to achieve its goals.

With this in mind YEF is a major vehicle for implementing many sustainability measures and with such a large remit YEF needs more funding and resources to achieve those goals.

We would like to make specific comments on the following YES areas.

Greenhouse Emissions

Energy Generation

In the urban context Solar PV has already started to influence the national demand profile for electricity generation. City of Yarra has the opportunity to increase the proportion of residential and commercial buildings with Solar PV with the right support from Council.

Carbon Offsets

If City of Yarra can only achieve its greenhouse reduction targets by purchasing carbon offsets, Council should consider how it can maximise offsets within Yarra. Council should consider sequestering carbon as well as reducing emissions. Pyrolysis is an option which allows the waste stream of organic material to be diverted into energy generation. Char is the by-product of this process which sequesters carbon in a stable form for centuries. It allows for the diversion of waste from landfill and turns it into a potential income stream. Any organic matter, including sewerage, can be used for pyrolysis.

LED Street lighting could be powered by solar panels.

Transport

YCAN would like to commend the City of Yarra's current Bicycle Strategy and its Public Transport Advocacy Campaign.

The three elements of active transport, cycling, walking and using public transport, need to mesh together with the provision of infrastructure that connects the three elements together eg bike paths to and parking at public transport stops; safe well-lit footpaths; plenty of bike parking.

The objectives of Council's Access 3121 project express well what is required:

1. To decrease single occupancy car use
2. To increase walking, cycling and public transport use
3. To increase awareness and positive perceptions about the use and benefits of walking, cycling and public transport serving the area.
4. To engage the community about using sustainable travel.
5. To demonstrate to the community that there are sustainable transport options and that those modes will make their area more livable.
6. To build capacity within Council to conduct travel behaviour change projects.

Public Transport

Council cannot increase public transport options within Yarra. It can however continue to lobby the State government for improved public transport options to be funded in preference to more freeways etc. The PTACSC should be funded through the budget cycle for the next three years to see council to its next election cycle. Council can also educate people with regard to public transport options and encourage their use. What has been learned from pilot programs such as Access 3121: Live Life Local that can be rolled out across the municipality?

Bicycle Infrastructure

The City of Yarra's has full power to implement excellent bicycle infrastructure. The highest level of interpretation of the Bicycle Strategy and its implementation should be budgeted for and resourced.

A complete bicycle network throughout Yarra is the missing link from the transport equation, City of Yarra's goal should be a bicycle network where most journeys can be completed on safe and separated bike lanes. The next Bicycle Strategy should include the upgrade of current compromised on-road lanes that are fragmented and contain elements that are far from safe and which inconvenience cyclists. Eg the route south from Clifton Hill to Richmond which involves a hair-raising ride down Trennary Crescent and then the choice of either a risky right turn at Johnson St or getting off the bike and walking across two pedestrian crossings. This is not a bike route.

Walking

The question of how Yarra can encourage pedestrians should be thoroughly researched. Priority for pedestrians at crossings over the convenience of motorists would be a component of that consideration.

Water

After a couple of years of good rainfall, it seems likely that we will be returning to low rainfall again, and water conservation will again become a key issue.

YCAN notes that City of Yarra exceeded its target of 40% reduction in water consumption well before the proposed date, and trusts that these reductions are holding.

In the original draft of the YES in 2008, water targets included 25% of council water requirements supplied by rainwater harvesting and treated wastewater. This was reduced to "10% of council water requirements supplied by alternative water sources" in the final Strategy. We were unable to find any mention of this target in the *Yarra City Council Environmental Footprint Report 2010/11*.

This is an important issue, and City of Yarra needs to lead the way in harvesting rainwater and use of treated wastewater where appropriate.

Waste

Organic Waste

The amount of organic waste going to landfill at enormous cost to Council and to the environment must be addressed.

The prospect of a State Government treatment centre for organic waste has long been promised and its construction and eventual operation, even if it doesn't fall off the agenda if we have a new government in the next two years, is a long way off.

Municipalities around the country and around the world are embracing the challenge of reducing organic waste. Council should examine successful examples such as the South Australian Recycling Kitchen Organics program

<http://www.portenf.sa.gov.au/page.aspx?u=1806>

and lead the way by finding local solutions to organic waste disposal that suit an inner suburban municipality.

Reduce, Reuse, Avoid

Council has already identified the costs and potential benefits of waste minimisation. Now that it is second nature for most residents to recycle, Council needs to move to the more weighty end of the Waste Pyramid and implement programs that encourage people to reuse, reduce and avoid products. This will result in more cost savings for City of Yarra and a reduced burden on the environment.

Pilot programs such as the Waste Savers program proposed in YES may address this issue, but we have been unable to find out if this program went ahead.

Food

There are only two targets in this category of the YES (one of which is about food purchased by Council). The term “urban agriculture” wasn’t even used. How things have changed since 2008! Food security has become an issue that we are thinking about seriously.

City of Yarra should be proud of its engagement in this area. But there is much more to be done. Though it has proved difficult to use public land for growing food, there are other options.

- Council should assist residents in facilitating and creating pop-up gardens on private vacant land.
- A Food Resilience audit of Yarra City mapping what land could be used for food production if the need arose should be undertaken.
- The Urban Agriculture Facilitator should be a permanent fulltime position
- Other concepts Council should develop include urban food corridors, urban forests, street food mapping, micro-gardens, sustainable harvest swap meets.
- Council could also investigate what livestock would be suitable for the urban environment. (eg. chickens, goats, rabbits, Japanese quail).
- Aquaponics is another unexplored area for a rich food resource.