

Case study – Lake Macquarie City Council



A city living within its environmental means

Surrounded by mountains, forests and ocean, Lake Macquarie is one of the fastest-growing cities in New South Wales, with a lifestyle few parts of Australia can match.

The city's centrepiece, Lake Macquarie, is twice the size of Sydney Harbour and the social and economic heart of the region; 174 kilometres of lake foreshore and 28 kilometres of coastline, sandy beaches, coves and bays.

'The lake is a much-loved feature of our area,' says Lake Macquarie Mayor, Greg Piper. It is no surprise that even those who don't use it on a regular basis recognise the need to protect its water quality and the overall environmental values of the lake and catchment.'

As Lake Macquarie's current population of 200,000 is expected to grow by about 70,000 people over the next 25 years, social, financial and environmental pressures will increase. But the civic leaders of this beautiful place will not allow Lake Macquarie to become a victim of its own popularity.

Lake Macquarie City Council Sustainability Manager Alice Howe says that although the council already had a strong environmental agenda, it saw the Sustainability Advantage Program run by the Office of Environment and Heritage, as a way to help the city enhance its performance in the areas of sustainable living and resource consumption.

'We have to manage the organisational complexity of an operation of 1100 staff and an annual budget of \$180 million,' ►

In brief

Saving money is important for all local governments because their costs are rising faster than their revenue streams. Lake Macquarie City Council joined the Sustainability Advantage Program, run by the office of Environment and Heritage, to improve resource efficiency, engage staff, and make its supply chain more sustainable.

Cost savings inevitably followed for Lake Macquarie City Council when the city:

- reviewed its purchasing practices to identify annual savings of \$2.4 million
- replaced 44 six-cylinder cars with more fuel-efficient vehicles to save 58,000 litres of petrol per year and \$60,000 in fuel costs
- installed light-emitting diode lights in its public car parks to save 12.5 megawatt hours of electricity per year – the equivalent of 11 tonnes of CO₂
- started a staff showerhead exchange which resulted in council employees together saving about 1160 kilolitres of water and 43.5 tonnes of CO₂ per year.



- says Howe. 'This creates some difficulties in making sure we identify appropriate areas to improve. We wanted to be thorough and put processes in place that change the way we do business rather than be ad-hoc.'

Lake Macquarie City Council concentrated on resource efficiency, engaging staff and making its supply chain more sustainable – with impressive results.

By halving the number of six-cylinder vehicles, Lake Macquarie City Council will save 58,000 litres of petrol and \$60,000 in fuel costs annually. Installing light-emitting diode lights in public car parks will save 12.5 megawatt hours of electricity – about 11 tonnes of CO₂. Putting solar panels on five of its facilities means the council can generate 73 megawatt hours of electricity each year, a further saving of 78 tonnes of CO₂ and \$15,000.

Lake Macquarie City Council conducted a detailed Energy Saver energy audit of its main administration building to identify more power savings. When the council implements the audit recommendations it will save 150 megawatt hours of electricity, or \$30,000, each year.

Lake Macquarie City Council will generate further environmental and financial gains by making changes to how the city manages its supply chain.

'Our involvement in Sustainability Advantage was timely because at the same time we were also reviewing our service providers to identify better ways to manage our purchasing,' says Howe. 'We expect some good environmental outcomes, as well as about \$2.4 million in savings – just by centralising our procurement model and minimising the range of products we consider to be acceptable.'

Lake Macquarie City Council has made a significant investment in sustainability, including a dedicated sustainability audit unit within a sustainability department. The unit's primary

responsibility is to track the organisation's sustainability investments, performance and returns in three major areas – sustainable living, natural heritage, and minimising risks to the community from the environment.

'We see this team as an opportunity to prove the value we return to ratepayers by making sure we are being cost-efficient in the way we run our services,' says council General Manager Brian Bell. 'We see ourselves as the level of government that is closest to people and our role is to make sure our community knows about all the opportunities available.'

Lake Macquarie City Council minimises the risks of climate change and resource depletion through various plans that monitor environmental sustainability, rises in sea level, demographic changes, and greenhouse gas emissions. The council is also one of the few local government authorities in Australia that has sought advice on how to reduce reliance on increasingly expensive transport fuels.

The city commissioned research from specialist Melbourne-based consultancy, the Institute for Sensible Transport to help prepare the Lake Macquarie City Oil Supply Vulnerability Policy. This plan outlines how Lake Macquarie City Council aims to reduce consumption of fossil fuels, promote a sustainable fuel supply, and encourage the development and use of alternatives.

Your next step

To find out how your business can join the Sustainability Advantage Program, contact the team:

Email sustainbus@environment.nsw.gov.au
Call 02 8837 6000
Visit environment.nsw.gov.au/sustainbus/sustainabilityadvantage.htm