

SUSTAINABLE ILLAWARRA

overview of the project

Sustainable Illawarra was a project by Wollongong, Shellharbour and Kiama Councils that empowered residents in reducing their ecological footprint through behavioral change and infrastructure at a household level and also saved over 6.4 million litres of water and embedded sustainability within the councils.

To reduce household ecological footprints, over 9,350 residents were engaged through the project's 124 events which included workshops, tours and expos and an innovative 'Sustainability Begins at Home' program. Workshop participants then went on to share the skills and knowledge gained with over 73,500 people.

One of the ways the project saved water was through stormwater reuse, one project installed a 280,000 litre capacity water tank which stored stormwater captured through a sand filter bed in Hindmarsh Park for use in the park's toilets.



PHOTO COURTESY DANIEL HOPPER

Sustainability begins at home!

how the project was carried out

At the beginning of this project, a telephone survey of 900 Illawarra residents was conducted to determine the community's knowledge and use of sustainable environmental practices in six areas: biodiversity, waste, better buying, water, energy and sustainable food. This knowledge helped develop a variety of workshops, events, information stalls and expos that better engaged residents and addressed key knowledge gaps.

Residents became aware of the project and events through a variety of sources such as the Sustainable Illawarra website, the project's monthly e-newsletter, newspaper advertisements, media releases, stickers and posters. Through these events participants learnt about 35 different sustainability topics including creating a frog pond, bike maintenance, backyard chicken keeping, cheese making and starting a backyard veggie patch. New resources were developed to support some events which included a sustainable living guide, sustainable shopping guide and a permaculture demonstration garden.

To improve the community's access to sustainability education, fifty books and DVDs promoting efficient water and energy use were purchased and distributed to libraries in the region. The community was also involved in the project through the Sustainable Illawarra 'Super Challenge' community education program. After applying to join the program through an Expression of Interest (EOI), 153 applicants participated in the program. Over 12 months, each household set and tracked their individual sustainability goals and monitored their living practices. Each household was supported by a \$200 tailored sustainability starter kit, a 65 page workbook and assistance from staff.

The councils involved have improved their own sustainability through developing a region wide Illawarra Sustainability Roadmap and council Sustainability Action Plans. To develop these plans council staff participated in a Triple Bottom Line capacity building program run by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI). This program guided staff through a series of

structured modules which analysed commitment to sustainability and potential areas for improvement.

outcomes now and in the future

After participating in the workshops, all surveyed participants went on to undertake positive changes at home and felt that the workshops increased their knowledge. Some events achieved direct savings in energy, water and waste in addition to savings achieved through behavioural change. For example, one of the events, a clothes swap, saved an estimated 332 kilograms of waste, 190,200 kilograms of CO₂ emissions and 3.17 million litres of water.

The Super Challenge program facilitated many sustainable activities such as the installation of 12 rainwater tanks, 24 households reusing greywater, 32 households planting natives on their property and the construction of 15 frog ponds.

benefits, challenges & lessons learned

Some of the promotional materials developed were less effective than expected. A1 posters were too large for most purposes — posters in a smaller size such as A4 would have been more effectively utilised. Sustainable Illawarra branded reusable drink bottles and shopping bags proved exceptionally popular and valuable in attracting participants to information stalls at community events.

Forty six percent of participants at Sustainable Illawarra events were over 55. To effectively engage a broader spectrum of the community, partnering with council community service teams to target specific community groups such as young adults and culturally and linguistically diverse communities would be beneficial, and avenues such as school newsletters and progressive forms of social media should have been considered.