



Yarra Ranges Council

Environment Strategy 2015-2025 Evaluation Report

Acknowledgement of Country

Yarra Ranges Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri and other Kulin Nation peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of these lands and waterways. We pay our respects to all Elders, past, present, and emerging, who have been, and always will be, integral to the story of our region.

We proudly share custodianship to care for Country together.

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Executive Summary

Yarra Ranges is one of Victoria's most environmentally significant regions, home to iconic forests, waterways, and rural landscapes that support biodiversity, agriculture, and cultural heritage. In 2015, Yarra Ranges Council endorsed the Environment Strategy 2015–2025 (the Strategy), a framework designed to guide environmental planning, stewardship, and resilience across the municipality.

The Strategy was the product of two years of consultation and collaboration. More than 1,500 residents, alongside Traditional Owners, environmental groups, businesses, and agencies, helped shape the overarching vision and six goals. This strong community mandate ensured that the Strategy not only reflected Council's policy priorities but also embodied local values and aspirations.

In early 2025, Yarra Ranges commissioned a comprehensive evaluation of the Strategy to determine whether outcomes and impacts have been achieved and learn from successes and challenges to inform the development of the next Yarra Ranges Environmental Strategy.

Key Findings

Residents, community groups and volunteers have played a vital role from development to delivery—this active stewardship is a hallmark of the Strategy. Collaborative partnerships have also been central to success, with regional alliances like the Eastern Alliance of Sustainable Learning amplifying resources and knowledge, and agency collaborations driving positive outcomes.

While the evaluation found there were process gaps in establishing targets and indicators, it also found that a key strength of the Strategy was its ability to act as a framework to umbrella the development of a substantial number of sub-strategies that do include targets and indicators.

Over \$18 million in external grants have supported key projects in resilience, biodiversity, water, and energy, including flagship projects like the Biochar Facility and Yering Billabongs Restoration.

Most importantly, the Strategy has both supported and adapted to cultural and institutional change. Knowledge, commitment, concerns and aspirations have all shifted over the course of the decade. The Strategy has not only held currency but has helped guide responses to these shifts. Council, volunteers, and partner organisations adopted a shared approach to environmental management which has underpinned progress towards each of the six goals.

Progress Against Goals

With no specific targets or indicators set, more than 100 metrics were identified and used to measure the Strategy's outcomes.

The progress bars shown on Table 1 provide estimated advancement towards each goal recognising that full achievement is unattainable. They are designed to guide improvement rather than offer a precise measurement.

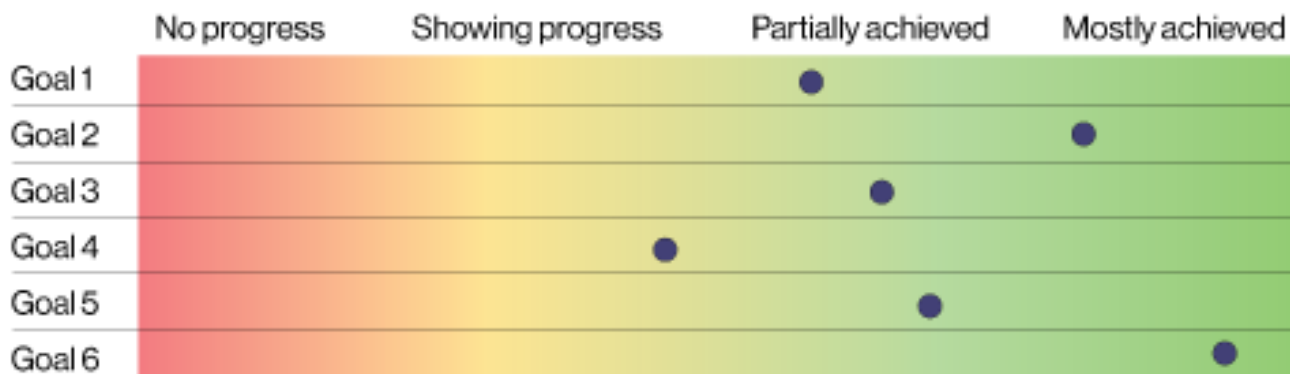


Table 1: Progress towards strategy goals: Part 1 – heat map, Part 2 – Statements of achievement



Goal 1

Protection of Iconic Places and Natural Character

Significant progress has been made in protecting Yarra Ranges' natural character, but improved monitoring, urban greening, and stronger enforcement will be required to manage future pressures.



Goal 2

Water Resource Improvement and Preservation

Gains were achieved in stormwater design, riparian health, and alternative water use, but inconsistent water quality outcomes point to the need for stronger institutional water efficiency and catchment-wide collaboration.



Goal 3

Protection of Native Plants, Animals, and Habitat Enhancement

The investment in revegetation, invasive species management, and habitat protection has strengthened biodiversity, though development pressures remain a challenge.



Goal 4

Local Economic Strengthening through Environmentally Sustainable Activities

Progress was made in linking sustainability to economic resilience, though data gaps limited the ability to quantify long-term economic outcomes. The Economic Development Strategy 2022-2032 will further embed the links between sustainability and economic resilience.



Goal 5

Community Resilience to Climate Change and Extreme Events

Strong institutional and household-level resilience measures were achieved, but reducing community-wide emissions should remain a focus.



Goal 6

Strengthened Environmental Stewardship

A strong cultural shift toward stewardship has been achieved, laying a substantial foundation for deeper engagement and leadership in the next strategy cycle.

Key Themes

The evaluation identified several themes cutting across all six goals.

Partnerships are critical

Most significant outcomes were achieved through regional and local collaboration.

Metrics matter

The lack of an evaluation framework limited Council's ability to effectively measure outcomes, however, a definitive framework could also have proven restrictive over time. The evaluation was able to use a broad scope and explore a wide range of measures.

Equity and inclusion

A range of programs (e.g. solar savers) considered vulnerable households, demonstrating sustainability must be socially just and environmentally sound.

Innovation and leadership

Flagship projects such as the Biochar Facility and The Adaptation Game positioned Yarra Ranges as a local government leader in sustainability innovation.

Accessibility and design

Future strategies must prioritise readability, inclusivity, and clear frameworks for monitoring trade-offs and co-benefits.

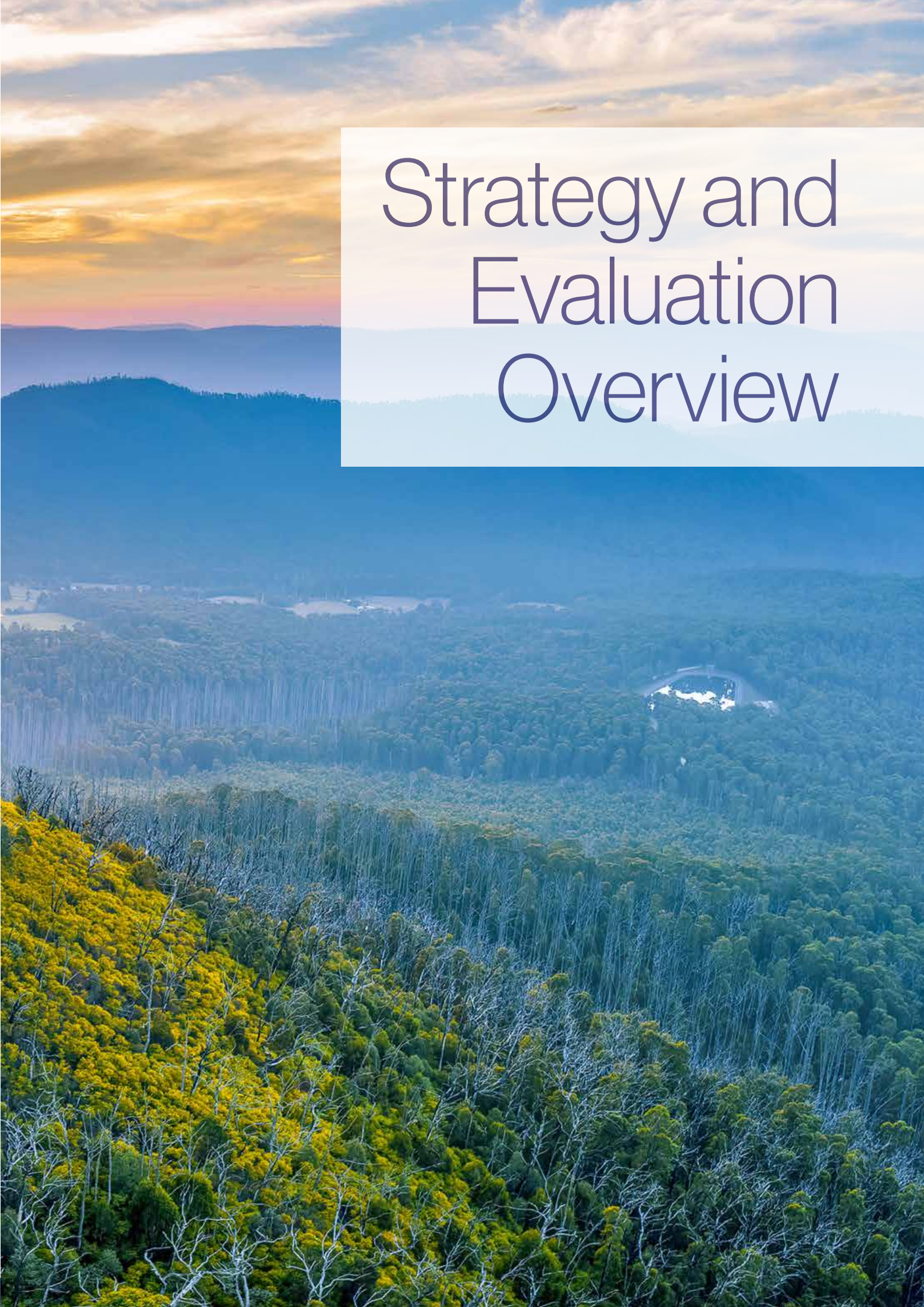
Conclusion and Recommendations

The Strategy has delivered substantial achievements in biodiversity protection, climate resilience, water management, and community involvement, supporting environmental stewardship as a shared cultural value across the municipality.

The next strategy should focus on:

- Establish an upfront evaluation framework to monitor outcomes and trade-offs.
- Strengthen integration between sub-strategies to avoid duplication and gaps.
- Embed Traditional Owner governance and Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing.
- Participation and attention of broader audiences, particularly the involvement of young people in the development and implementation.
- Maintain an equity and inclusion focus to ensure benefits are shared across all communities.
- Explicitly measure the co-benefits of environmental action for health, wellbeing, and economic resilience.

With these improvements the next Strategy can position Yarra Ranges as a national leader in regenerative, inclusive, and climate-resilient environmental planning.



Strategy and Evaluation Overview

1.1 2015-2025 Environment Strategy Background

Yarra Ranges is renowned for its natural environment, boasting areas of significant native vegetation, valued township and urban streetscapes, forested mountains, rural valleys and waterways that make up a critical part of Melbourne's water catchment.

The Environment Strategy 2015-2025 ('the Strategy') recognised the role Council plays in maintaining the significant and valued natural areas for the current community and future generations. The Strategy was almost 2 years in the making, developed to guide environmental activity across Yarra Ranges. It was unanimously endorsed by Council on March 24, 2015.

At the time it was developed, the Strategy acknowledged (as does this report) that Yarra Ranges' natural environment contains some of the most important environmental areas in Victoria. This includes the Mountain Ash forests of the Dandenong Ranges and Central Victorian Highlands, and remnant native vegetation that is home to iconic species such as the Powerful Owl, the Helmeted Honeyeater and Leadbeater's Possum.

The upper half of the Birrarung (Yarra River) and its tributaries support a diverse range of plants and animals and provide approximately 70 per cent of Melbourne's drinking water. Environmental assets within areas modified by humans include areas converted to agriculture, urban and rural settlements, transport infrastructure, parks, gardens, and sports fields. The Strategy names agriculture as a significant component of the Yarra Ranges landscape and "the richness of the municipality's agriculture has made it an important food production area for Victoria" (p.10).

Over the life of the Strategy, the Yarra Ranges natural environment has attracted people to visit, and live, drawn by the diverse and attractive scenery it offers.

1.2 Evaluation Purpose

As the 'life' of the Strategy comes to end, and after guiding Council for more than a decade in a rapidly changing context – including the COVID 19 pandemic and devastating June 2021 storms – it is critical to take stock of influence, impact, successes and challenges to examine what has occurred and to inform future priorities.

Commissioned in June 2025, this evaluation tells the story of the Strategy through a process and methodology of reflection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data.

The evaluation has aimed to assess outcomes and impacts, learning from past successes and challenges to inform the next Strategy.

1.3 Visions, Goals and Principles

The 2015- 2025 Environment Strategy is aligned to the 2036 Yarra Ranges Community Vision:

Whether you live here or visit, you will see how much we value our natural beauty, how connected our communities are, and how balanced growth makes this the best place in the world.

Council's vision from the Environment Strategy for the environment and that has driven the decade of policies, plans, programs and activities, is:

We are dedicated to making Yarra Ranges a place of thriving communities, at home in healthy landscapes.

Both the 2036 Community Vision and the Strategy vision make clear the relationship between health and environments and healthy communities – when environments thrive, so too do communities.

The Strategy strengthens this link in defining three elements by which six goals were set (Figure 1).

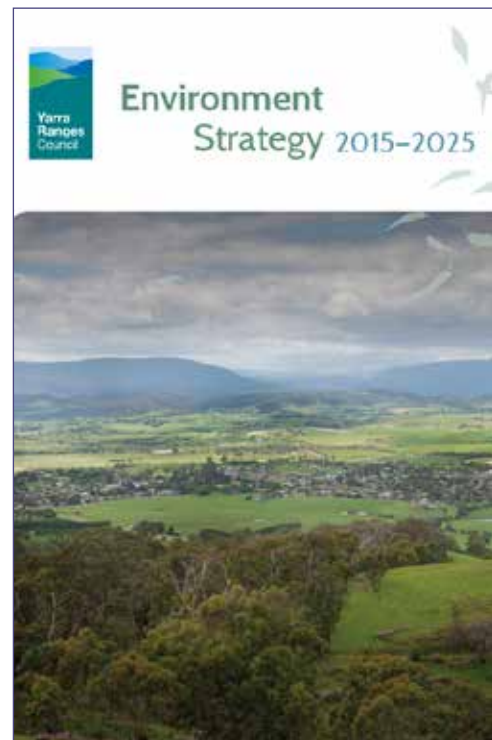


Figure 1: Themes and goals of Yarra Ranges Environment Strategy 2015-2025

Alongside these goals the Strategy has eight principles designed to inform and support the planned approach Council takes to environmental actions, programs and projects (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Environment Strategy 2015-2025 principles to inform and support approaches and activities

1.4 Evaluation Method

The full evaluation methodology is in Appendix 1, however key features to note are:

- The evaluation is broad in scope since there are process, impact and outcome aspects.
- The scope was defined in the Evaluation Framework developed in early 2025.
- The key evaluation questions are:
 - Have we done what we said we would do? (Process)
 - Are we having the influence we expected? (Impact)
 - Have we achieved the change we sought? (Outcome)
 - What worked well and what needs improvement? (Process)

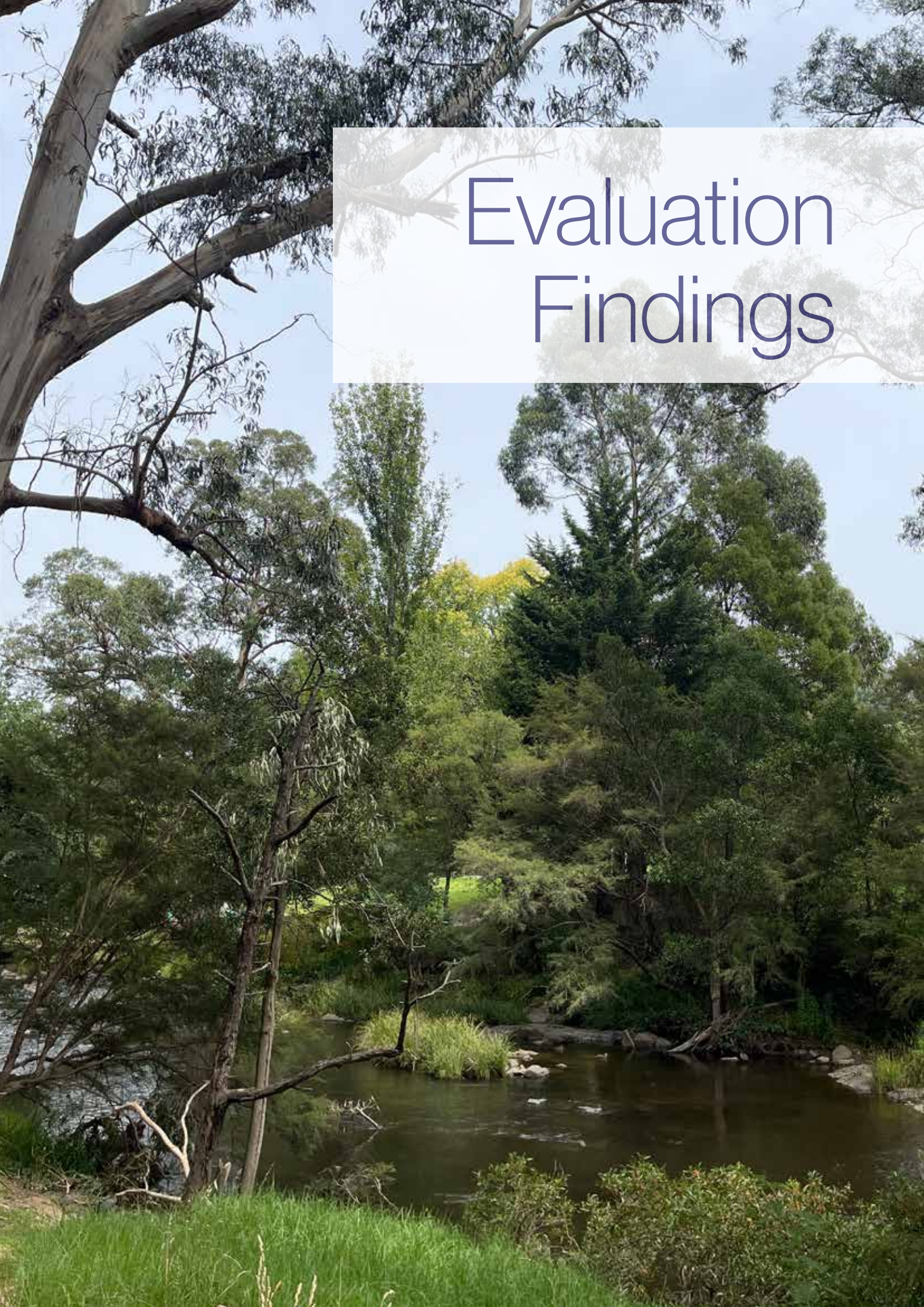
The findings are structured around these questions and while they are examined individually, process, impact and outcomes are not discrete categories. There is interdependency, and given Council does not hold sole responsibility for the Strategy goals, process has significant influence on the ability to achieve the Strategy's outcomes and impacts (and therefore vision).

Environment strategies typically involve long-term goals, spanning many years, and are influenced by numerous external factors (mostly) beyond the control of local governments. Pertinent to this evaluation, factors include:

- The Strategy did not establish targets or outline metrics to determine success. Therefore, to support the evaluation, several internal consultations and workshops were held with subject matter experts (SMEs) to determine what data existed that could provide a suitable measure for progress. This process provided a suite of data across over 100 metrics.



- While Yarra Ranges covers 244,700 hectares, only 2% is Council owned. There is 30% in private ownership and 68% is Crown land, limiting Council's overall ability to protect and sustain environments. Thus, other agencies, private enterprises and landowners carry more responsibility (legislated and voluntary) and therefore impact for land management.
- As a responsible planning authority, a primary role for Council over the decade has been to advocate for, and have influence over, flora and fauna protection, habitat management, restoration and enhancement.
- Measuring the impact of advocacy work is notoriously challenging, since it is rarely a single factor that brings the desired change or result.
- The Strategy has taken place over 10 years and has involved a significant number of activities and initiatives. These have mostly been undertaken in partnership with other agencies and organisations. Identifying the most important of these initiatives and/or players is neither feasible nor desirable, since most successful partnerships create synergy where the parts cannot be separated from the sum.
- Within the scope of this evaluation there was no intention to measure the degree to which positive or negative change against the Strategy goals can be attributed to Council initiatives. This does not preclude the possibility of examining the degree to which Council initiatives might have contributed to change or progress over time.



Evaluation Findings

This section provides the key findings identified from the evaluation. The first part considers the process and impact components, examining the planning and implementation of the Strategy, as well as effects of activities, strategies and programs. The second part examines the outcomes, identifying and reporting measurable changes over time (Appendix 3).

The process component of the evaluation considered how the planning and implementation of the Strategy had contributed to the success and challenges identified over the life of the Strategy.

The impact component of the evaluation focused on the immediate effects of activities, strategies and programs. In doing this, the evaluation acknowledges, first the substantial number of programs and activities over the life of the Strategy, and second that these are mostly undertaken in partnerships with other organisations and/ or agencies.

Specifically, the evaluation examines the development aspects of the Strategy and how these informed and enabled the early implementation. Notably, the rigor that characterised the development of the Strategy and early implementation set in train a process and framework under which the Strategy maintained currency in changing internal and external contexts and environments.

2.1 Process: Have We Done What We Said We'd Do?

2.1.1 Strategy Development

Key finding: The development aims of the Strategy were met, reflecting community values and creating a shared vision.

The Strategy was designed as a long-term, overarching framework to guide environmental sustainability and resilience within the municipality. Building on the earlier 2008 Environment Strategy, it aimed to integrate diverse plans, policies, and community values into a single cohesive vision.

The development of the Strategy included specific aims that sought to:

- Reflect community values and create a shared vision for environmental stewardship.
- Ensure strong community engagement throughout its development.
- Secure Councillor involvement to anchor the strategy within the political and organisational context.

Rather than prescribing every action in detail, the Strategy was framed as an umbrella strategy, setting out overarching vision, principles, and goals that could align with sub-strategies on biodiversity, climate resilience, water, fire, and other themes.

2.1.2 Community Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement

Key finding: Innovative approaches were used during community consultation and this contributed to stakeholder interest over the life of the Strategy. The evaluation found that the vision, goals and principles did not emerge from internal expertise or Council priorities alone, but from a robust conversation with the people and communities that are part of Yarra Ranges.

Extensive community consultations took place over 12 months from late November 2013 through to the early November 2014. Approximately 1500 people were consulted across both rounds with demonstrated representation across Council regions.

Consultation extended to advisory committees (Environment Advisory Committee, Disability Advisory Committee, Indigenous Advisory Committee), environmental volunteer groups, agriculturalists, graziers, agencies such as Melbourne Water and Chambers of Commerce. A cross-organisational steering group, alongside a practitioners' working group, ensured input from across Council departments, creating a genuinely collaborative outcome. Councillors were briefed regularly, ensuring political alignment within a dynamic environment.

To generate conversation during consultations and to encourage community participation content development, Council developed several short discussion papers. The discussion papers² covered several topics including 'Native Plants and Animals', 'Water', 'Fire', 'Pests and Weeds', 'Energy Use and Climate Change', and 'Liveable Communities'.

Two phases of community consultation occurred:

- Phase One (2013–2014): Six public events at markets and community spaces, designed to capture broad perspectives on environmental values and priorities.
- Phase Two (2014): Thirteen events in shopping centres, train stations, and main streets across the municipality. These included distributing business cards with the 'Have Your Say' web link at train stations, prompting commuters to review the draft strategy during their journey. Online tools, quick polls, and surveys complemented the face-to-face sessions. This round emphasised feedback on the draft strategy and reached more than 1,100 people, with 600 engaged directly face-to-face.

Strategic diligence was taken to ensure internal and external stakeholders were not only engaged but had opportunity to voice opinions. This was a key success factor in the implementation and securing ongoing interest stakeholders had with the Strategy and in many cases this evaluation. A review of the consultation findings and the Strategy itself, makes clear that the development of the Strategy was not only informed by stakeholder views, but included their aspirations, concerns and ideas.

Importantly, the Strategy drew on Indigenous values ('Caring for Country'), early settlement history, and contemporary community concerns. Feedback suggested the structure had clarity, flowing logically from vision to goals and supported by inclusive language with community and Wurundjeri voices.

The Strategy was launched in March 2015 and endorsed unanimously by Council.

The strength of the feedback demonstrated strong community endorsement with 87% of survey respondents agreeing with the goals of the draft strategy.

2.1.3 Process Conclusion

Overall finding: While some elements, such as evaluation and accessibility, were weaker, the overall process was positive and has laid the groundwork for a more integrated, resilient, and accountable future strategy.

The Strategy (2015–2025) successfully created a shared vision for environmental resilience, backed by broad community consultation, Indigenous inclusion, and strong partnerships.

² These discussion papers are available on request. While developed over a decade ago, upon review many still have currency, and at a minimum, are informative in terms of defining the environmental settings at the time for local and state levels, and in some cases nationally.

The development and early implementation of the Strategy represent a landmark in local government environmental planning. Developed through extensive consultation, shaped by community values, and framed as an umbrella policy, it has provided a decade of guidance for resilience, biodiversity, and sustainability.

While challenges existed (accessibility, evaluation, youth engagement), its legacy is substantial as demonstrated through the portfolio of innovative and measurable projects and a culture of collaboration and adaptive learning.

2.2 Impact: Are we having the influence we expected?

The Strategy has been the lead document used for articulating how Council will achieve one of its key strategic objectives in the Yarra Ranges Council Plan - Protecting and Enhanced Natural Environment, providing consistency and detail for this shorter, and higher-level strategic direction.

As reported in later sections of this evaluation, there were a significant number of projects, activities and strategies developed during the life of the Strategy that supported its impact. These contributions came from multiple departments within Council and included lead projects and strategies that supported tangible changes (reported in the Outcomes section).



Strategic Objective

Protected and enhanced natural environment, a healthier environment for future generations.

Vision

We are dedicated to making Yarra Ranges a place of thriving communities, at home in healthy landscapes.



2.2.1 Strategic Impact

Key finding: The Strategy provided the framework by which subsequent strategies and plans (Figure 3) were able to deepen, specify, extend, and update many of the Strategy goals.

Figure 3 provides a list of key strategies and timeframes determined in the evaluation to have been influenced by the Strategy. These sub-strategies operationalise the vision and goals of the Strategy, providing measurable targets, broadening the scope (biodiversity, climate, cultural governance, waste, transport), and helping make resilience more concrete. The detailed analysis is provided in Appendix 2, with the highlights including:

- Reinforcing and updating goals with specific targets and actions: these newer plans help to move the Strategy from vision and broad actions toward implementation with quantifiable and timed outcomes.
- Updating risk, resilience, and climate adaptation: these subsequent works ensured the Strategy remained relevant since many environmental conditions have changed since 2015, including climate change impacts, community demand, and regulatory expectations.
- Embedding accountability, monitoring and governance: newer plans have introduced more frequent, measurable monitoring and reporting, strengthening transparency, cross-departmental collaboration, and long-term momentum.
- Expanding Scope: environmental priorities such as urban heat, circular economy, transport emissions, and cultural governance have gained prominence since 2015 and are now more effectively addressed through updated strategies and plans that embed sustainability and Traditional Owner partnerships into Council's actions.
- Economic and social co-benefits: a healthy environment is foundational to physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being, and recent strategies increasingly integrate climate action, cultural recognition, and sustainability to deliver measurable co-benefits across health, equity, resilience, and economic development.



Figure 3: Council strategies supporting the Environment Strategy

2.2.2 Partnership Impacts

Key finding: Strategic and effective partnerships had an impact on amplifying Council's reach and effectiveness through shared expertise, resources, and regional collaboration.

The evaluation has already noted that to achieve the Strategy goals, Yarra Ranges would have to seek trusted partners who shared the Strategy vision, and more importantly, have influence and the ability to achieve the vision. The partnerships identified in this evaluation are substantive, and in many cases long term.

Example partnerships analysed as part of assessing impact included (detail in Appendix 2):

- Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (EAGA)
- Eastern Alliance for Sustainable Learning (EASL)
- Smart Water Network: Tanks for Platypus Project
- Landcare
- Melbourne Water Stormwater Management Partnership
- Eastern Transport Coalition (ETC)
- Peri-Urban Weed Management Partnership
- Alternative Waste Processing Partnership

These partnerships specifically align with and support the Strategy goals:

- Goals 1–3 are supported through biodiversity, weed, pest, water, and habitat-focused networks.
- Goal 4 is supported mainly by EAGA, Alternative Waste Processing, and transport advocacy, tying environment into financial and social outcomes.
- Goal 5 is strengthened by climate, water, and pest management partnerships that directly address extreme event risks.
- Goal 6 is well covered by EASL, Landcare, and community-facing elements of other partnerships, ensuring education and engagement are core.

Partnerships span climate action (EAGA), education (EASL), water, and biodiversity (Smart Water, Stormwater Partnership, Biodiversity Planners, Landcare), waste & circular economy (Alternative Waste Partnership), pest & weed management (Pest Animal Network, Peri-Urban Weeds), and advocacy (ETC). Together, they reinforce Council's environmental goals through shared resources, regional advocacy, technical expertise, and on-ground delivery.



2.2.3 External Funding Impacts

Key finding: External grants significantly extended impacts of the strategy by offering financial support to initiatives that aim to protect and preserve the natural environment.

Over the life of the Strategy Council has received over \$18,300,000 in grants from external sources (Table 2: External Grant Funding). On average that is over \$1.8 million per year with each grant approximating to over \$205,000 per annum. Grant funding is outlined in Table 2.

Year	Number of Grants	Amount
2015 - 2016	-	-
2016 – 2017	5	\$431,251
2017 - 2018	7	\$700,317
2018 - 2019	11	\$870,341
2019 - 2020	11	\$665,092
2020 – 2021	7	\$1,879,199
2021 - 2022	12	\$1,163,482
2022 - 2023	11	\$3,164,661
2023 - 2024	13	\$4,717,453
2024 - 2025	12	\$4,715,907
TOTAL	89	\$18,307,704

Table 2: External grant funding

This funding includes \$6 of the \$10 million provided by the Australian Government under the Preparing Australian Communities grant program in 2022 (full receipt reflected in 24/25). This grant funded the Resilient Yarra Ranges program to reduce disaster risk and strengthen community resilience to fires, floods, storms and landslides. The project was delivered between 2022 and 2025 across seven projects (see Case Study 1).

These grants assisted to cover the costs of projects that focussed on environmental conservation, biodiversity improvement, and sustainable practices. By funding these projects, external grants led to increased community participation, improved environmental outcomes, and a more resilient local economy.

Case Study 1

Resilient Yarra Ranges

The Yarra Ranges is one of Australia's most disaster-impacted municipalities, facing recurring bushfires, floods, storms, droughts, and landslips. In 2022, Yarra Ranges Council secured \$10 million through the Australian Government's Preparing Australian Communities program to strengthen resilience. Between June 2022 and March 2025, seven complementary projects were delivered across the municipality, spanning prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery.

The Resilient Yarra Ranges program set out to:

- Reduce disaster risk exposure.
- Build community preparedness and adaptive capacity.
- Support long-term resilience through stronger infrastructure, governance, and partnerships.

Key Achievements

- **Proactive Tree Management:** Over 930 km of roads inspected, and 13,000 trees assessed, reducing bushfire and storm hazards and safeguarding evacuation routes.
- **Place-Based Resilience Planning:** Community fuel management plans developed in Monbulk, Healesville, Yarra Junction, and Mt Dandenong/Kalorama, supported by advanced fire modelling and local action groups.
- **Resilient Energy:** A feasibility study for a Monbulk microgrid improved Council's understanding of local energy resilience, with pilot planning underway.

- **Resilient Buildings:** Upgrades to 19 Council facilities, including solar, batteries, and generator plug-ins, improved energy security and reduced emissions.
- **Emergency Relief Network (YRERN):** Strengthened governance, coordination, and resources now support over 70 service organisations, improving preparedness and collaboration.
- **Changing Places:** Construction of an accessible change facility (toilet, shower, and change space) enabled people with high needs to stay with support networks during evacuations — used during the March 2025 Montrose fires.
- **Landslip Risk Assessment:** New erosion and debris flow mapping informed planning scheme changes, streamlining development decisions and reducing risk exposure.

Collectively, the projects improved community safety, Council–community relationships, and long-term adaptive capacity. Council staff reported stronger cross-team collaboration and a cultural shift towards integrated resilience planning.

Most initiatives will continue beyond the funding period, leaving a legacy of safer infrastructure, better-prepared communities, and stronger governance systems. The Resilient Yarra Ranges program demonstrates how diverse, locally tailored projects can work together to reduce risk, strengthen community connections, and build resilience to future disasters.



2.2.4 Flagship Program and Project Impacts

Key finding: Flagship projects form a multi-dimensional approach to sustainability in Yarra Ranges. They combine technical innovation, ecological restoration, social engagement, and equity measures. The impacts range from tangible environmental outcomes, such as carbon sequestration, water savings, biodiversity gains, to less tangible but equally critical outcomes such as community empowerment and cultural recognition.

The following flagship projects have been identified within the evaluation as those that provide a best example of promising practice with tangible outcomes. The projects are dependent on partnership, participation, and clear, measurable objectives. In some cases, external funding has also facilitated and enabled project design, implementation and impact.

- Biochar Facility (2023–ongoing): a facility that converts organic waste into biochar, a carbon-rich, soil-enhancing product.
- Yering Billabongs Restoration (2020-2025): ecological restoration of the Yering Billabongs, a key wetland habitat.
- Biodiversity Offset Program (2012 – ongoing): by securing and managing offset sites, Council ensures no net loss of biodiversity while also creating long-term ecological value.
- The Adaptation Game (TAG) (2024 – ongoing): a tool designed to increase community awareness of climate risks and build local adaptive capacity.
- Ribbons of Green (2008–ongoing): one of the longest-running programs, it provides seedlings, technical advice, and coordination to restore landscapes across the municipality.
- Energy and Water Saver Kits (2021 – ongoing): kits to enable residents to save energy, water, and money and an accessible entry point for sustainable living.
- Solar Savers (2019 – ongoing): regional initiative assisting households, particularly low-income residents, to install rooftop solar systems through financial and technical support.

Across all these projects the evaluation has identified several themes (Table 3).

Theme	Description
Climate change mitigation and adaptation	From carbon storage in biochar and revegetation, to awareness-building through TAG, Council is investing in both sides of the climate challenge
Community participation	Most initiatives rely on empowering residents, schools, and volunteers, embedding sustainability at the grassroots.
Equity and inclusion	Solar Savers and Saver Kits highlight Council's commitment to ensuring vulnerable residents share in sustainability gains.
Innovation	Projects like the Biochar facility and TAG showcase creative solutions that position Yarra Ranges as a leader.
Long-term resilience	Infrastructure such as stormwater harvesting, combined with revegetation and offset programs, builds ecological and social resilience.

Table 3: Flagship projects common themes

The program and project portfolio demonstrates how a local government can lead by example, translating strategy into on-ground action and embedding sustainability across landscapes, communities, and generations.

2.2.5 Impact Conclusion

Key finding: The Strategy has successfully served as a foundational framework for Council's environmental leadership, guiding a decade of action across biodiversity, climate resilience, and community involvement. Its influence is evident in the breadth of sub-strategies and flagship projects that have operationalised its vision, embedded sustainability across departments, and adapted to evolving environmental challenges.

The sub-strategies reflect a growing organisational maturity, with many developed in the past five years alone. This evolution has shifted implementation from a centrally managed approach to a more agile and adaptive culture – one that responds strategically to changing internal and external conditions, including climate impacts, legislative shifts and community aspirations.

Strategic partnerships have amplified Council's reach, while over \$18 million in external funding has enabled tangible outcomes in conservation, resilience, and innovation. Flagship programs such as the Biochar Facility, Yering Billabongs Restoration, and Ribbons of Green exemplify how technical excellence, community participation, and equity can converge to deliver lasting environmental and social benefits.

Together, these efforts demonstrate how a long-term strategy, when paired with adaptive delivery and collaborative governance, can translate vision into measurable impact across landscapes, communities, and generations. Without a clear, goal-orientated Environment Strategy, these efforts risk fragmentation and diminished impact.

2.3 Outcomes: Have We Achieved the Change We Sought?

The outcome component of the evaluation aims to examine the long-term effects of the Strategy, specifically whether the goals were achieved and to what extent. Since the Strategy did not establish specific targets or indicators, the Evaluation Framework identified outcomes for each goal and then metrics for each outcome. Across the six goals more than 100 metrics were identified and then data was sourced for each year of the Strategy, where available, to determine changes over time.

This section provides a high-level summary of the information presented in Appendix 3: Findings in Detail. Section 3 of this report presents the 'best metrics' for each goal, recommending that they are reviewed as metrics for the future Strategy.

Key Findings

The evaluation of the Strategy highlights meaningful long-term progress across the six outcome goals, while also acknowledging gaps in measurement and areas requiring sustained effort.

Protecting iconic places and natural character has been partially achieved, with strong results in weed control, planning permit regulation, and agricultural land retention. However, pressures from illegal dumping, vegetation removal without permits, and the absence of consistent tree canopy data remain concerns.

Water resource management has shown mostly positive outcomes. Investments in riparian restoration, stormwater management assets, and alternative water use have strengthened ecological resilience, exemplified by the Yering Billabongs project. Nonetheless, declining water quality at monitoring sites and rising Council potable use highlight ongoing vulnerabilities.

Biodiversity protection has advanced significantly through deer control, large-scale revegetation, and habitat restoration programs such as Ribbons of Green and Gardens for Wildlife. Conservation ratings for reserves have improved, though vegetation clearance and reliance on offsets remain challenges.

Local economic strengthening through sustainability is evident in expanded procurement with local suppliers, the integration of Environmentally Sustainable Development principles, and capacity-building workshops. Initiatives like the Upper Yarra Local Development Strategy demonstrate how sustainability and economic diversification can align.

Community resilience to climate change has been bolstered by Council's 40% reduction in operational emissions, deployment of renewable energy, fire preparedness measures, and community engagement tools like The Adaptation Game. Still, community-wide emissions remain high and uneven resilience capacity persists.

Finally, **environmental stewardship** has deepened through strong volunteerism, waste diversion (especially organics recovery), education initiatives, and regional collaborations. Challenges remain around recycling rates and participation consistency, but stewardship culture is increasingly embedded.

Overall, the Strategy has created measurable ecological, economic, and community benefits while laying the foundation for more integrated, accountable, and adaptive approaches in the next strategic cycle.



Goal 1

Protection of Iconic Places and Natural Character



While direct measures of ecological health are limited, several indicators, such as planning controls, weed management participation, agricultural land use, and urban greening efforts, suggest that protection has been an active, though slightly uneven, priority.

Weed and Vegetation Management

One of the clearest signals of active protection comes from the Weed Wipe-out Voucher Program, which expanded considerably over the decade. Participation rose from 398 households in 2015/16 to a peak of 901 in 2021/22, before stabilising at just under 800 participants in 2024/25. Weed control is vital to preserving the natural character of forests, waterways, and agricultural lands, as invasive species pose a significant threat to biodiversity. The growing and sustained uptake suggests rising community participation in vegetation management, strengthening the resilience of local ecosystems.

Planning and Development Regulation

Planning permit data highlights how growth pressures are being managed in ways that affect landscape character. The number of planning permit applications received fell steadily from 1,840 in 2015/16 to around 1,150 by 2024/25

Permits issued also declined in parallel with applications, suggesting either reduced development demand or stronger regulation. The consistently high proportion of ‘no permit issued decisions’ (200–270 annually) reflects a planning system willing to limit inappropriate developments that could compromise environmental or landscape values. Additionally, amended permit applications - an indicator of negotiation to better align development with environmental or design standards - remained significant. Together, these figures and changes to the planning scheme (the introduction of Amendment C148 into the Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme) suggest an active role

for the planning system in safeguarding natural character against overdevelopment.

Alternatively, on average there are an average 28-30 cases of vegetation removal without a permit every year. There was no data available to determine how much vegetation has been cleared on an annual basis. This will be an important metric to measure future success.

Urban Greening and Design

The lack of consistent reporting here makes it difficult to assess progress in protecting urban character through tree planting, green corridors, or place-making strategies. Similarly, lack of meaningful data for tree canopy cover leaves a key gap in understanding of how canopy cover and biodiversity corridors - critical to the region's character - are being preserved or enhanced. This absence of monitoring may undermine confidence in long-term protective measures, even if anecdotal or project-level initiatives are underway. The evaluation notes that with the establishment of the Nature Plan (2024-2034) and Tree Canopy Strategy 2024-2034 more rigorous monitoring and reporting targets have been established against key objectives.

Agricultural Land and Rural Character

Preservation of agricultural landscapes is another important dimension of protecting iconic places. The number of properties applying for a farm rate fell from 1,877 in 2015/16 to 1,568 in 2024/25, while the number of businesses classified as agriculture, forestry, and fishing also declined slightly from 744 to 712.

This gradual reduction reflects structural shifts in rural land use, potentially threatening the continuity of traditional agricultural character. However, the relatively small decline across a decade indicates that farming remains an active and significant land use, preserving much of the region's open landscapes.

Emerging Pressures

Challenges remain evident. Incidents of dumped rubbish spiked from 1,603 in 2022/23 to 2,596 in 2024/25, signalling pressures on natural areas from illegal waste disposal. Unmanaged dumping poses reputational and ecological risks to the region's most iconic sites. Instances of unpermitted native vegetation removal averaged 28-30 cases per year, with limited reporting of scale or litigation outcomes. Combined with gaps in urban greening data, this suggests areas where protective measures require reinforcement.

Conclusion

Overall, the available evidence indicates that iconic places and their natural character have been actively protected through robust weed management, strong planning permit regulation, and maintenance of agricultural land use. Community participation in weed eradication highlights broad stewardship, while planning data demonstrates institutional restraint on development that could compromise environmental integrity. However, weaknesses in monitoring (e.g. tree cover, greening initiatives) and emerging threats such as waste dumping and illegal vegetation removal temper the picture. The region has made meaningful strides in protection, but sustaining the natural character of its iconic places will require stronger data collection, proactive urban greening, and continued vigilance against development and waste pressures. Also, as indicated in earlier sections of this report, Council's partnerships and advocacy work has contributed to active protection of both Council and non-Council owned environments.



Goal 2

Water Resource Improvement and Preservation

No progress

Showing progress

Partially achieved

Mostly achieved



The data provided a multifaceted picture of water resource management, encompassing water quality, nitrogen reduction, riparian health, stormwater assets, alternative water use, and consumption trends. Overall, the evidence suggests progress in preserving and improving water resources, though some results are uneven and indicate areas requiring sustained attention.

As already noted earlier in this evaluation, addressing these areas is not Council's sole responsibility. The evaluation acknowledges the limited control Council have for this goal and that there are other agencies (State and private enterprise) whose primary and legislated role it is to manage and protect Melbourne's waterways. Council's interest is to continue to work with partners given the strategic importance of the Yarra Ranges catchment areas.

Water Quality and Nitrogen Reduction

Monitoring results highlight both positive outcomes and areas of concern. At the Yarra River Upper (Warburton East), water quality scores declined from 9.5 in 2015/16 to 7.83 in 2019/20, suggesting deterioration. However, Nitrogen loads fluctuated. After reaching a low of 4.62 tonnes in 2021/22, they rose to 11.28 tonnes by 2023/24. Similarly, Woori Yallock Creek showed water quality falling from 6.17 in 2015/16 to 3.67 in 2018/19, before partial recovery to 4.5 in 2019/20. Nitrogen levels there improved dramatically, declining from 1.1 tonnes in 2016/17 to zero by 2022/23, reflecting strong catchment interventions

Taken together, the data reveals successful nutrient management in specific sub-catchments, even as overall water quality indices point to ongoing pressures such as land use impacts, stormwater runoff, or climate variability.

Riparian and Habitat Restoration

Riparian vegetation provides crucial buffers for waterway health. The dataset has only two points and no data is available from 2019 onwards. The two data points show a sharp increase in high-quality riparian vegetation in the Yarra Catchment, rising from 245 hectares in 2015/16 to 1,477 hectares in 2018/19 (likely hectares or survey points).

This expansion signifies substantial investment in habitat restoration and a direct contribution to improved water quality and ecological resilience but the lack of recent data and sparse data for billabong and wetland rehabilitation makes conclusions difficult to secure.

Stormwater and Water-Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD)

Council has expanded its use of WSUD assets, which filter and treat stormwater before it reaches waterways. WSUD assets increased from 102 in 2015/16 to 138 in 2024/25, with corresponding nitrogen removal rising from 283 kg to 343 kg annually.

While these amounts are modest, they demonstrate a steady, preventative approach embedded within urban design. The consistency of these figures across recent years suggests a plateau in new installations and therefore consideration might be given to strategic opportunities for further installations to continue to improve water quality.

Alternative Water Use and Efficiency

Capacity for alternative water use has expanded significantly, from just 2 ML per year in 2015/16 to 8 ML by 2024/25. This diversification reduces reliance on potable supplies and helps preserve surface and groundwater reserves. Coupled with stabilising overall water consumption by residents across the Yarra Ranges - falling slightly from 12,334 ML in 2015/16 to around 11,700 ML in 2022/23—the trend points toward improved efficiency and sustainable use.

However, Council potable water consumption has fluctuated, rising from 175,632 kL in 2016/17 to over 207,000kL in 2024/25, suggesting that internal operations may need stronger conservation measures.

Conclusion

Water resources in the Yarra Ranges have been actively preserved and improved in key areas. Nitrogen reductions leading to waterways, expanded riparian vegetation, and increased stormwater management assets all demonstrate tangible ecological benefits. Alternative water use and stabilised community consumption further reinforce sustainable use. Yet, the decline in water quality indices at identified monitoring sites and the rise in Council's own potable use, highlight ongoing vulnerabilities.

Overall, stewardship has delivered measurable gains, but sustaining and extending improvements will require targeted efforts in water quality protection, stormwater treatment and reuse scaling, and institutional water efficiency.

Case Study 2

Yering Billabongs Project

The Yering Billabongs Project is an example of Yarra Ranges commitment to billabongs and wetlands rehabilitation. Delivered by Yarra Ranges Council in partnership with Melbourne Water, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (WWCHAC), Zoos Victoria and community, the project concluded on 30 June 2025. A key focus was on the ecological and cultural restoration of 60 hectares of floodplain along the Birrarung (Yarra River) and Olinda Creek. Restoration will continue over the coming years through the Green Links project.

A 2024 Cultural Values Assessment by WWCHAC identified the site as culturally significant and provided recommendations to embed Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural practices into the projects design, delivery and future site management.

The site, historically cleared and grazed until 2024, has undergone significant hydrological modification. To restore floodplain function, a

diversion from Olinda Creek was constructed to seasonally fill natural depressions (May–November), regulated by a water gate. This supports habitat creation, biodiversity and ecological resilience.

In summary, the Yering Billabongs Project (2020–2025) has:

- Implemented the recommendations from the 2024 Cultural Values Assessment.
- Delivered strategic stormwater management within the Birrarung's rural reach.
- Installed infrastructure to enable rewilding via controlled floodplain inundation.
- Enhanced biodiversity and supported cultural, recreation and environmental outcomes.
- Advanced priorities of the Yarra Strategic Plan for the Lower Rural Reach, protecting billabong systems between Yering and Tarrawarra.





Goal 3

Protection of Native Plants, Animals, and Habitat Enhancement

No progress

Showing progress

Partially achieved

Mostly achieved



The data demonstrates significant investment in protecting biodiversity, enhancing habitat, and addressing major threats such as invasive species and vegetation loss. While pressures from land use change and weeds remain, the overall evidence suggests steady progress in conserving native plants and animals and improving habitat quality.

It is important to note here (as with Goal 2), Council has a (vital) role to play alongside other agencies (in this case DEECA) that have primary lead in biodiversity conservation. That is, Council aims to contribute to the goal, since it does not have control of the goal.

Invasive Species Management

One of the most significant advances has been in the efforts to control increasing deer populations. These populations pose major threats to native flora and fauna. The State Funded local program has expanded to cover 30,000 hectares of land by 2024/25, with 335 deer controlled annually in recent years.

Partner programs extend this impact dramatically, with deer management efforts spanning 315,000 hectares and resulting in over 4,000 deer controlled. This large-scale response indicates a coordinated approach that directly reduces browsing pressure on vegetation and protects native ecosystems from degradation.

Revegetation and Habitat Expansion

Revegetation efforts with plants of local provenance and selected for the respective habitat type have been substantial. The Ribbons of Green program planted over 70,000 plants in 2024/25, more than doubling outputs compared to 2015/16 and more than 500,000 over the decade.

Bushland Reserves recorded over 105,000 plantings in 2024/25, further contributing to biodiversity restoration. The Gardens for Wildlife program has also grown steadily, distributing over 1,200 plants annually to residents for habitat gardens. Together, these programs significantly expand habitat corridors, strengthen ecological resilience, and provide resources for native animals, including pollinators and birds.

Habitat Quality and Conservation Value

Indicators of bushland quality suggest measurable gains. Weed cover in Council reserves has shifted positively. In 2015/16, 21% of reserves had over 50% weed cover, compared to only 19% in 2024/25. At the same time, the proportion of reserves with low weed cover (<5%) increased from 20% to 27%, reflecting stronger management and improved habitat quality.

Conservation ratings also improved, with reserves classified as “Very High” rising from 18% in 2015 to 24% in 2025, while “Low” ratings dropped from 23% to 18%. These shifts point to long-term gains in ecological integrity on Council managed land.

Wildlife Support

Direct measures to support wildlife habitat are evident through the installation of nest boxes and artificial hollows which grew from 96 to 288 over the reporting period. These provide crucial shelter for hollow-dependent species, offsetting storm damage from 2021 and the slow natural formation of tree hollows. Cultural and ecological burns, though only recently initiated, mark another step toward restoring habitat dynamics that many native species rely upon.

Vegetation Protection and Offsetting

Pressures from development and infrastructure remain. Between 2019/20 and 2024/25, permitted vegetation removal averaged around 5–7 hectares per year, with dozens of large trees lost annually. Council works added further small-scale losses. However, these impacts were counterbalanced through the Biodiversity Offsets Program, which issued nearly \$390,000 at its peak and maintained offsets in the form of biodiversity units. While offsets cannot fully replace old-growth or complex habitats, their use demonstrates regulatory mechanisms to mitigate unavoidable losses.

Conclusion

The Yarra Ranges has actively protected native plants and animals and enhanced their habitats through large-scale deer control, extensive revegetation, weed management, and direct wildlife support measures such as nesting boxes. Improvements in bushland conservation ratings and reduced high-level weed cover highlight ecological gains. While vegetation removal through planning and Council works introduces challenges, offsetting frameworks and revegetation programs help balance these pressures. Overall, the trajectory is one of strengthened biodiversity protection and a more resilient landscape for native species.



Local Economic Strengthening through Environmentally Sustainable Activities

No progress

Showing progress

Partially achieved

Mostly achieved



The Yarra Ranges' performance data from 2015–2025 demonstrates a strong and growing alignment between environmental sustainability initiatives and local economic development. While not all indicators are comprehensive, evidence across procurement, workshops, development strategies, and green business assessments suggests that environmentally sustainable activities have increasingly supported and strengthened the local economy.

Capacity Building and Skills Development

Capacity building programs for private property owners provide a clear link between sustainability and economic resilience. From 2015–2016, four workshops were delivered annually, but in later years these evolved into more targeted events such as “Farming Solutions for a Changing Climate,” “Healthy Horses, Healthy Land,” and pest preparedness workshops.

These programs not only encouraged sustainable land management but also provided landholders and small business operators with practical skills to adapt to changing environmental and economic conditions. Such training fosters economic resilience by improving productivity, reducing long-term costs, and helping property owners manage risks from climate change and biosecurity threats.

Sustainable Business and Development Integration

The adoption of sustainability assessments in planning processes demonstrates structural change in the local economy. The introduction of Built Environment Sustainability Scorecard (BESS) assessments and Environmentally Sustainable Development (ESD) referrals grew rapidly, from 13 in 2019/20 to 82 by 2024/25.

These assessments integrate sustainable design principles into building and development projects, strengthening the local construction and property industries by embedding long-term efficiency, reducing environmental impacts, and creating demand for green design expertise. Such integration reflects a growing shift towards a 'green economy' ensuring that development not only supports population growth but also enhances environmental performance.

Council's Economic Development Strategy 2022-2032 'Towards a regenerative Yarra Ranges' will see clearer and stronger outcomes over the next decade.

Local Procurement and Supplier Engagement

Perhaps the clearest evidence of economic strengthening lies in procurement data.

Council's spend with local suppliers rose from approximately \$31 million in 2018/19 to \$45 million in 2023/24, stabilising above \$44 million in recent years.

The number of local suppliers engaged annually also remained high, with over 400 businesses consistently involved. This demonstrates that sustainable procurement practices - favouring local businesses and reducing environmental footprints through shorter supply chains - directly bolstered the regional economy. By embedding environmental considerations into purchasing, Council both stimulated local enterprise and supported sustainability outcomes.

These local businesses provide significant opportunities for partnerships to build local economic capacity to improve environmental sustainability.

Transition and Strategic Planning

The Upper Yarra Local Development Strategy provides an important future-oriented example. Funded to support Warburton, Yarra Junction, and Powelltown, the strategy explicitly aims to assist communities directly affected by the Victorian Forestry Plan to develop a local development strategy that supports their transition from commercial native timber harvesting. This then leads to the creation of new jobs in sustainable industries, and in long-term economic and social benefits for each community.

The project is set to be completed in 2027 and will be a cornerstone project demonstrating how locally-led initiatives can support sustainable economies – especially those in transition from less sustainable economies.

Local Expertise and Community Events

Employment of local experts at environmental events has averaged between 20–30 people per year, and while seemingly modest, demonstrates a direct economic benefit from sustainability programming, with local professionals providing ecological, agricultural, and educational expertise. Similarly, community-led environmental events - though not consistently reported - represent opportunities for local service provision, tourism, and hospitality to benefit from environmentally themed activities.

Conclusion

The evidence indicates that environmentally sustainable activities have contributed substantially to strengthening the Yarra Ranges' local economy. From skills-building workshops that enhance landholder resilience, to BESS assessments embedding sustainable design into development, to procurement practices that channel millions into local businesses, sustainability has become a key economic driver. Strategic initiatives like the Upper Yarra Local Development Strategy further highlight the region's commitment to aligning ecological stewardship with economic diversification. While some areas lack consistent data, the overall trend is clear: environmentally sustainable activities are no longer peripheral but central to the strength and future resilience of the local economy.



Goal 5

Community Resilience to Climate Change and Extreme Events

No progress

Showing progress

Partially achieved

Mostly achieved



The metrics provide a detailed picture of progress in building resilience to climate change and extreme events.

The definition for resilience used here is: “the ability to prevent, withstand and recover from the harmful impacts of shocks and stressors, including those exacerbated by climate change”.

Evidence points to greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions, renewable energy uptake, emergency preparedness, and community participation. This suggests that resilience has strengthened overall, though challenges remain in scaling up efforts to meet accelerating risks.

Greenhouse Gas Reduction and Renewable Energy

Council has made notable progress in reducing its operational carbon footprint. Council GHG emissions fell significantly from 14,161 tonnes of CO₂ emissions in 2015/16 to 8,551 tonnes of CO₂ emissions in 2022/23, a reduction of over 40%.

This reflects a combination of energy efficiency initiatives and renewable energy deployment. Solar capacity on Council buildings grew steadily, with 75 systems installed, providing 1,591 kW of renewable generation capacity. Complementing this, 17 battery storage systems were added across facilities, boosting energy security and resilience to grid disruptions. These investments not only reduce emissions but also enhance the capacity of public infrastructure to withstand energy shocks during extreme events.

At the community level, solar installations expanded to nearly 1,500 systems per year by 2021/22, while hot water upgrades supported household energy efficiency. The addition of 13 EV chargers at Council assets and an expanded EV fleet of 10 vehicles demonstrate progress in the clean

energy transition.

Together, these measures help insulate both Council and community from volatile energy markets and build adaptive capacity in the face of climate stressors.

Community Adaptation and Empowerment

Community-facing initiatives have grown significantly. The My Energy and Water Savings Kits, introduced in 2021, expanded rapidly to 22 kits by 2024/25, borrowed 725 times with additional demand waiting.

This program directly empowers households to reduce energy and water use, strengthening resilience by lowering costs and reducing reliance on strained utilities during climate extremes.

Innovative engagement was achieved through The Adaptation Game, a participatory program that trained 16 council staff as facilitators and engaged 150 staff and 50 community members in scenario-based learning. Such tools build adaptive thinking and strengthen preparedness for future climate risks.

Emergency Management and Preparedness

The expansion of Emergency Management Township Plans (informed by the Preparing Australian Communities evaluation) provides a structured foundation for resilience at the township level. Roadside vegetation management, including 2,500 km of roadside slashing and 7–11 km of fuel reduction annually, directly addresses bushfire risks.

These proactive measures reduce hazard exposure for communities living in high-risk areas. Additionally, the network of emergency management groups - 17 in the Hills, nine in Upper Yarra, four in the Valley, and one urban - reflects a strong grassroots framework for local preparedness and response.

Ongoing Challenges

Despite progress, the community's GHG emissions remain high, with reductions plateauing after 2019/20 at around 120,000 tonnes of CO₂ emissions. This underscores the scale of the challenge in reducing emissions at the community-wide level. Engagement with some emergency management groups is uneven, suggesting that resilience capacity is not equally distributed. Furthermore, climate pressures are accelerating, and while programs are impactful, they will need scaling to match the pace of change.

Conclusion

Overall, Yarra Ranges communities are more resilient to climate change and extreme events than a decade ago. Council's emission reductions, renewable energy investments, adaptation engagement, and fire preparedness have collectively strengthened resilience. However, sustained and expanded effort is needed to reduce community-wide emissions, deepen engagement, and enhance adaptive infrastructure. Resilience is improving but must continue to evolve in pace with intensifying climate risks.

Further, with the amendments to the Planning and Environment Act, there is clear recognition that planning has a critical role to play in the response to climate change. Climate will need to have a bigger part of the next strategy ensuring the complexities of strengthening resilience and adaptation are addressed as the negative elements of climate change reality intensifies.

Case Study 3

The Adaptation Game

The Adaptation Game (TAG) is a board game designed to help individual and communities better understand extreme weather events – such as heatwaves, floods, and fires – and identify practical actions to build personal and community resilience to weather-related challenges. It is based on scientific evidence about how climate change will affect the Yarra Ranges, exploring practical ways to adapt and contribute to community resilience, as well as understand the projects and programs already being implemented by council. TAG is a cooperative game where all the players work together. You will play with three other people whilst a facilitator guides you through the game.

Key community resilience benefits of TAG include:

- **Enhanced Understanding of Climate Impacts:** By engaging with simulated climate shocks, participants gain a deeper understanding of potential challenges, fostering proactive adaptation strategies.
- **Strengthened Community Collaboration:** The game's team-based approach encourages collective problem-solving, building social cohesion and a shared commitment to resilience.
- **Practical Experience in Climate Adaptation:** Participants apply theoretical knowledge to practical scenarios, bridging the gap between learning and real-world application.
- **Identification of Vulnerabilities and Solutions:** The simulation helps communities pinpoint their most vulnerable sectors and collaboratively develop targeted adaptation measures.
- **Empowerment and Capacity Building:** By actively participating in the adaptation process, community members are empowered with the skills and confidence to implement effective climate resilience actions.





Goal 6

Strengthened Environmental Stewardship

No progress

Showing progress

Partially achieved

Mostly achieved



The evaluation finds that environmental stewardship within the Yarra Ranges has been strengthened in several ways, despite some areas showing fluctuations or emerging challenges. Stewardship is understood as “active care for the natural environment through community engagement, resource management, and waste reduction”, and it appears to be both broadening and deepening across multiple programs.

Community Participation

Community involvement has grown markedly. The Gardens for Wildlife program demonstrated a sharp rise in participation, from just 33 participants in 2016/17 to over 1,000 inclusive by 2024/25.

Similarly, the Ribbons of Green initiative increased its participant base from 29 properties in 2015/16 to 61 properties in 2024/25, reflecting growing support for revegetation and biodiversity programs. The Environmental Volunteer Group Support has remained steady, consistently active over the ten-year span, with volunteer hours peaking above 55,000 in 2019/20. While overall volunteer numbers vary year to year (from under 1,000 to nearly 3,000), the long-term trajectory highlights a resilient volunteer culture. These figures indicate not only sustained but expanding stewardship, with residents directly investing time and labour in environmental care.

Waste Diversion and Resource Recovery

Resource recovery statistics show significant improvement. Overall waste diversion increased from around 29,000 tonnes in 2015/16 to nearly 47,000 tonnes in 2024/25. This reflects enhanced recycling systems, expanded organics collection (FOGO), and growing community uptake. Notably, Garden Organics and FOGO tonnages tripled across the decade, climbing from 9,651 tonnes in 2015/16 to over 31,000 tonnes by 2024/25. Such expansion illustrates both

improved Council infrastructure and a public willingness to separate waste streams responsibly. Conversely, residential recycling tonnages fell from 17,413 in 2015/16 to 14,182 in 2024/25, suggesting either declining participation or lighter-weight packaging. Nonetheless, the surge in organics collection indicates a structural shift toward higher-impact diversion.

Networks, Alliances, and Education

The Eastern Alliance for Sustainable Living (EASL) membership has grown, with Yarra Ranges continuing as a core member while the alliance itself expanded from five to seven Councils in 2025. EASL events also demonstrate rising reach with annual attendees increased from 76 in early years to nearly 1,000 by 2024/25 and newsletter subscriptions expanding from 106 to 760 subscribers.

ResourceSmart Schools engagement further indicates intergenerational stewardship, climbing from 15 Yarra Ranges participating schools in 2021/22 to 28 in 2024/25. These results highlight investment in education, collaboration, and behavioural change that extend stewardship beyond individual programs toward systemic cultural adoption.

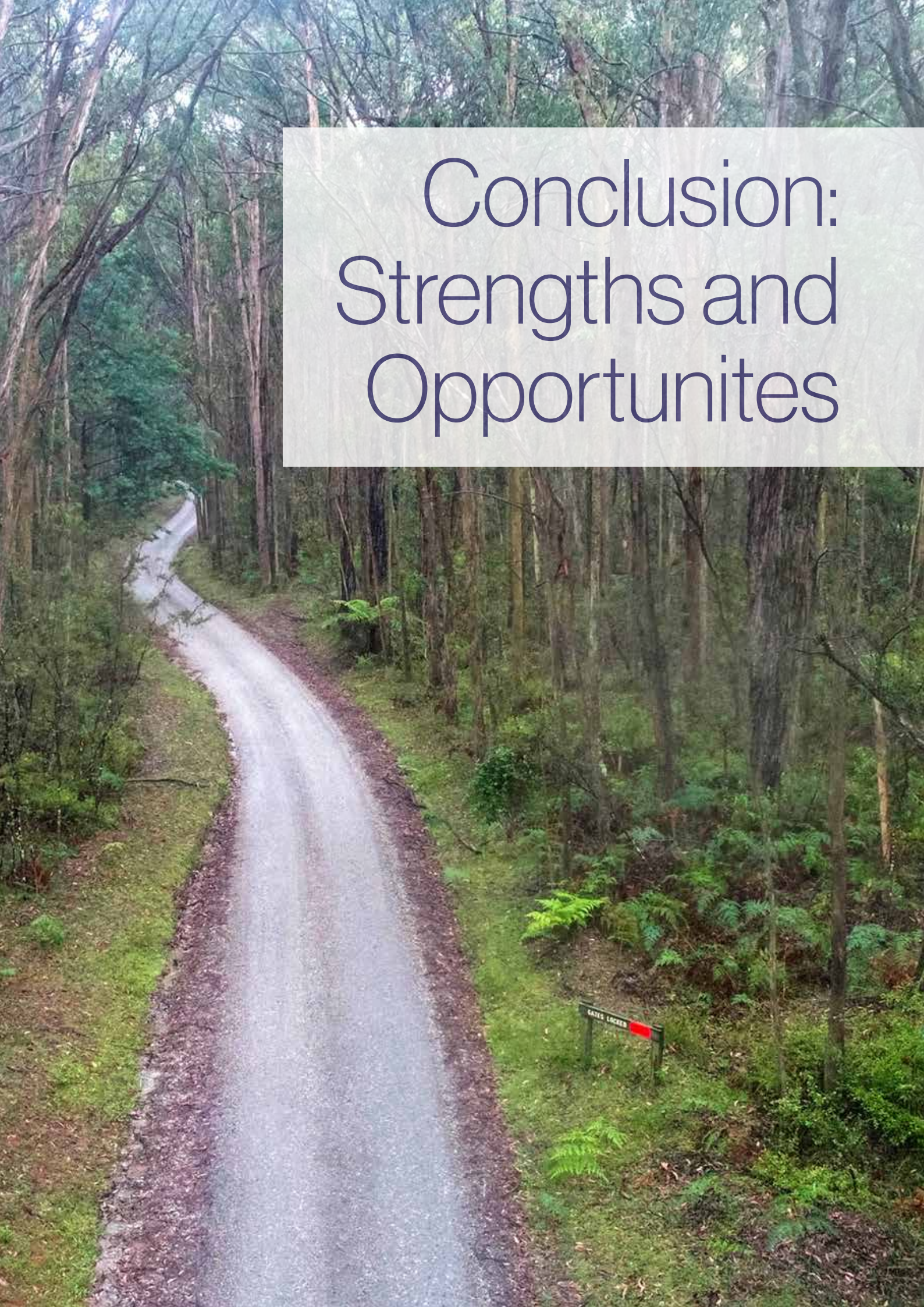
Emerging Challenges

Not all indicators point upward. Residential recycling is declining, hard rubbish to landfill remains stubbornly high, and e-waste recovery is inconsistent. Volunteer numbers dipped in some years, and the number of community events fluctuates. These highlight ongoing opportunities to strengthen participation, and adaption to changes in consumer waste patterns. Moreover, while stewardship breadth has expanded, depth measured by consistent participation across all indicators - remains uneven.

Conclusion

Overall, environmental stewardship has clearly been enhanced across the Yarra Ranges. Community participation in programs like Gardens for Wildlife and Ribbons of Green shows strong engagement with biodiversity goals. Waste diversion, particularly through organics recovery, demonstrates tangible environmental benefit. Education and alliances have broadened the stewardship base, embedding sustainability into schools and regional networks. Despite challenges in recycling consistency and some volunteer variability, the cumulative evidence reflects a maturing stewardship culture—one that has diversified, expanded, and embedded itself into the fabric of community life.



A photograph of a dirt road winding through a forest. The road is light-colored and curves to the left. The forest is dense with tall trees and green undergrowth. A semi-transparent white box is overlaid on the upper right portion of the image, containing the text 'Conclusion: Strengths and Opportunites' in a dark blue, serif font. In the lower right foreground, a small black sign with white text and a red arrow points towards the road.

Conclusion: Strengths and Opportunites

GASOL LOCKER

The evaluation finds that the Strategy has provided a strong foundation for protecting the municipality's natural character, fostering resilience, and embedding sustainability across policy, practice, and community life. Over its ten years, the Strategy has demonstrated that environmental stewardship and achieving positive outcomes is not the work of Council alone but the result of sustained partnerships with Traditional Owners, agencies, landholders, businesses, volunteers, and residents. The evaluation shows clear gains in biodiversity management, waterway health, climate resilience, and sustainable economic practices, underpinned by innovative flagship projects and significant external investment.

The absence of metrics included in the Strategy might indicate the limited efficacy of the findings, however, the freedom to employ a more dynamic and less prescriptive methodology to identify potential and concrete outcomes, allowed the complex story of the Strategy emerged. The Strategy's legacy lies not only in measurable outcomes – such as revegetation, renewable energy uptake, reduced emissions, and strengthened emergency preparedness – but also in the cultural and institutional shifts it fostered. Community participation, Indigenous inclusion, and cross-organisational collaboration have created a lasting culture of shared responsibility for the environment. At the same time, challenges remain such as gaps in monitoring and evaluation frameworks and emerging pressures such as waste dumping, vegetation loss, and climate risks. These underscore the need for a more integrated and data-driven approach.

Looking ahead, the next Strategy has the opportunity to build on this decade of progress by embedding clearer metrics and evaluation tools, strengthening integration between sub-strategies, enhancing accessibility and cultural governance, engaging with more diverse audiences and explicitly measuring the co-benefits of environmental action for health, equity, and economic resilience. By deepening its commitment to partnership and accountability, Council is well-placed to lead a new chapter – one that not only protects and restores the municipality's landscapes but also nurtures thriving, resilient communities for generations to come.

3.1 What Worked Well

The development and implementation of the Strategy achieved several significant outcomes that reflect both strategic foresight and practical impact.

Increased community awareness and engagement

Over 1,500 residents were directly engaged in the Strategy's development, with strong endorsement of its strategic goals, demonstrating broad community support and ownership.

Clever engagement

Transport hubs and mainstream venues were effective for reaching large, diverse populations.

Policy integration

The Strategy served as an umbrella framework, guiding the development of key sub-strategies focused on biodiversity, climate resilience, and tree canopy management, ensuring alignment across Council's environmental planning.

Cultural inclusivity

The inclusion of Wurundjeri Elders' perspectives added cultural depth and significance to the Strategy. At the time, this was a notable achievement. Looking ahead, the next iteration of the Environment Strategy will move beyond inclusion toward a culturally driven approach, embedding Traditional Owner values, knowledge, and ways of working into the protection and preservation of Country.



Practical environmental gains

The Strategy supported the creation of sub-strategies that have led to measurable improvements in biodiversity management, water and energy planning, and community education, translating vision into on-ground outcomes.

Institutional learning

The Strategy process strengthened Council's capacity to design, deliver, and evaluate long-term environmental policy, building internal capability and fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

Additional strengths identified through the evaluation include:

Breadth of coverage

The Strategy addressed a wide range of environmental levers—biodiversity, energy, climate, environmentally sustainable design, and liveability—while supporting the development of targeted sub-strategies.

Community partnerships

Strong networks were established with volunteers, graziers, businesses, and agencies, providing resilience and shared ownership in program delivery.

Cross-organisational collaboration

Staff from diverse departments worked collectively, supported by steering groups that ensured robust governance and accountability.

Adaptive delivery

Despite some project delays, the Strategy's implementation remained flexible, with adjustments made to ensure key actions were completed within funding and timeline requirements.

Clear vision and principles

The Strategy's inclusive tone, logical structure, and effective use of community storytelling helped communicate its goals and values, fostering engagement and understanding across stakeholders.

3.2 What needs improvement

Challenges and improvement opportunities include:

Engagement with critics

Resistance was noted from some groups, such as graziers, who felt underrepresented in the early stages. Stronger upfront identification of critics may have reduced tensions.

Engaging young people

Despite best efforts, youth input in consultation was limited.

Design and accessibility

The final document's accessibility could have been better addressed, with design adjustments impacting readability. Reviews later emphasised the need for improved compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), being a set of international standards to make content more accessible to people with disabilities.

Evaluation framework

The lack of a fully developed evaluation framework during the Strategy's inception limited consistent opportunities for measuring Strategy outcomes.

Co-benefits and prioritisation

Missing frameworks on resilience and risk, limited cross-referencing to sub-strategies, and absence of trade-off analysis.

Data collection

Data collection was often manual, person dependent and inconsistent across areas.



3.3 Recommendations

Challenges within the planning and implementation processes offer valuable lessons for the next iteration. As feedback and analysis highlights, the successor strategy should build on the solid foundation of the 2015 Strategy with clearer governance, increased integration of sub-strategies, stronger frameworks for adaptation and risk, and a more accessible design. There is also a significant opportunity to develop a framework for measuring the co-benefits of a healthy environment for physical, emotional, social, and mental health.

Considerations for the next iteration:

Early stakeholder engagement

Identify potential critics early and create tailored engagement plans to reduce resistance and build trust.

Embed evaluation early

Develop evaluation processes and metrics alongside the Strategy to address data gaps and ensure monitoring frameworks are in place from the beginning.

Enhance youth participation

Explore ways to better engage younger audiences.

Cultural knowledge

Embed Traditional Owner governance and Indigenous knowledge systems, ensuring cultural inclusion and deeper collaboration to care for country together.

Maintain momentum

Continue to address persistent challenges such as data gaps, emerging environmental threats, and limitations in Council's direct influence through maintaining strong partnerships and data systems.

Strengthen communication

Incorporate quotes and community voices more prominently to enhance authenticity and relatability in communications.

Equity and inclusion

Maintain a strong equity and inclusion focus, with clear targets and inclusive design that amplifies diverse community voices.

Invest in governance and leadership

Ensure steering groups have adequate time and resources and cultivate strategic thinkers and emerging leaders for ongoing input.

Design for accessibility

Embed accessibility and inclusive design principles from the outset, ensuring compliance with guidelines and improving readability for all users.

Integrate strategy components

Strengthen integration with other strategies and contemporary legislation, including mapping interrelationships, and embedding circular economy principles.

Use digital tools

Explore interactive digital formats to improve engagement, transparency, and accessibility.

Align reporting

Align reporting mechanisms to avoid strategic drift and maintain coherence across plans. This can be supported by the annual Yarra Ranges Sustainability Report.

Measure co-benefits

Explicitly measure the co-benefits of environmental action, particularly for health, wellbeing, and economic resilience.

Embed engagement and indicators

Continue to embed engagement with Traditional Owners, landholders, and communities, and ensure clear indicators of success are defined to track outcomes and impacts.

Dynamic metrics

The complexity and variability of environment systems lends itself to having diverse and adaptive measures rather than single metrics that may obscure progress.

Legislative responsiveness

Ensure the Strategy remains agile and aligned with evolving legislation through policy engagement, and adaptive reporting mechanisms.

In terms of improved measurement and reporting, Table 4 provides some suggested metrics for consideration.

Goal	Best Metrics
Goal 1 Protection of iconic places and natural character 	• Weed wipe-out voucher participation (or similar) as it is a strong proxy for community involvement and stewardship in land care. • Incidents of dumped rubbish as a clear indicator of focussed waste management strategies that might include strengthened enforcement and deterrence through surveillance, higher penalties, and community awareness campaigns. • Agricultural use change as an indicator that monitors the degree to which natural character and environments are being protected and even enhanced. • Collect consistent tree canopy cover data to track greening outcomes – as reported against the targets in the Tree Canopy Strategy 2024-2044.
Goal 2 Water resource improvement and preservation 	• Nitrogen loads (Yarra River and Woori Yallock Creek) as sensitive, outcome-focused water quality measure. • WSUD assets and nitrogen removal as a tangible infrastructure-driven outcomes. • Council potable water use for accountability for organisational leadership. • Monitoring the frequency and transparency for riparian vegetation health and aquatic biodiversity.

Table 4: Recommended metrics

Goal 3

Protection of native plants, animals, and habitat enhancement



- Ribbons of Green plantings and Gardens for Wildlife participation is a good indicator of habitat restoration.
- The monitoring and reporting of the actions in the Nature Plan 2024-2034.
- Conservation value of bushland reserves is a strong outcome-oriented biodiversity measure.
- Numbers of nesting boxes added each year as a key metric to rehabilitating and restoring flora and fauna habitat and the protection of threatened species and vegetation communities.
- Permitted vegetation removal (hectares/trees) allows for the tracking of habitat pressures.
- Scaling up pest animal programs with stronger partnerships and community reporting tools.
- Establishing mandatory offset ratios for vegetation removal to ensure no net loss and determining the mechanisms to track vegetation cover annually to measure change.
- Mechanisms to improve weed control and reduce illegal vegetation incidents on both Council and private lands.

Goal 4

Local Economic Strengthening through Environmentally Sustainable Activities



- BESS assessments and ESD referrals are a strong, forward-looking indicator of sustainable building uptake.
- Spend with local suppliers allows for tracking both local economic benefit and sustainable procurement.
- Monitoring and reporting sustainable business practices across the supply chain which can be strengthened and reported through Council procurement processes.
- Capacity-building workshops delivered, attendance and breadth of topics are a reasonable proxy for engagement with landowners and businesses.

Goal 5

Community Resilience to Climate Change and Extreme Events



- Council and community GHG emissions (tCO2e) as a headline climate outcome measure.
- EV fleet size and chargers installed are a clear proxy for transition readiness.
- Solar PV installations (Council and community) are a strong renewable energy indicator.
- Participation in resilience-building programs (The Adaptation Game, township plans) are a valid measure of community-level preparedness.

Goal 6

Strengthened Environmental Stewardship



- Resource recovery (waste diversion tonnes) being outcome-focused, tracking landfill avoidance.
- FOGO/organics tonnes collected as a strong indicator of behaviour change.
- Container Deposit Scheme collections being a clear high-volume success measure.
- Environmental volunteer hours to capture community stewardship capacity.
- Stewardship perspectives through Community ID survey.

Appendix 1: Methodology

The section defines the scope of the evaluation and the methodology used to examine the efficacy of the Strategy.

Scope of the evaluation

The evaluation is broad in scope since there are process, impact and outcome aspects, as well as examining the degree to which the Strategy goals were achieved. The scope is defined by the evaluation questions to be explored and contained in the Evaluation Framework, developed in early 2025.

Evaluation questions

The first part of the evaluation examines the process, impact and outcomes and identified the enablers and challengers to the Strategy’s success.

Specifically, the **process** component of the evaluation considers the planning and implementation of the Strategy, asking critical questions about how processes have contributed to the Strategy’s success as well as identifying improvement opportunities.

The **impact** component measures the immediate effect of activities, strategies or programs and whether they met the stated objectives. A key measure of influence is projects and programs undertaken over the life of the Strategy. The evaluation considers pilots, externally funded initiatives, partnership arrangements or specific program evaluations.

Finally, since the Strategy did not establish specific targets, to assess the achievement of the Strategy’s vision, **outcomes** were considered for each goal.

The key evaluation questions are outlined in Table 5

Process evaluation questions Have we done what we said we would do? What worked well and what needs improvement?	• Were activities undertaken and reported on? • Were there contributions from multiple departments? • Were there any significant challenges that hindered the delivery of activities and how were they addressed? • How effectively were resources allocated to ensure the activities were completed as intended?
Impact evaluation questions Are we having the influence we expected?	• How closely do specific projects or programs align with and actively promote the principles of the Environment Strategy? • What has been the level of community engagement and uptake of our programs? • Have there been measurable changes in public awareness, attitudes or behaviours related to environmental conservation within the Yarra Ranges community? • What is the quality and significance of feedback from participants regarding relevance and effectiveness of programs and projects?

Outcome evaluation questions
Have we achieved the change we sought?

- What specific environmental indicators have improved as a direct result of the strategy (e.g., reduction in carbon emissions, increase in biodiversity)?
- How do the outcomes align with the original vision and goals, and where have expectations not been fully met?
- How have key stakeholders responded to the strategy's initiatives and what have been the outcomes for the broader community?
- What social or economic benefits (or challenges) have emerged alongside environmental improvements?
- Has the strategy had any unintended consequences or side effects, either positive or negative?

Table 5: Process, impact and outcomes evaluation questions

Importantly, while the questions contained in Table 5 are examined individually, process, impact and outcomes are not discrete categories. There is interdependency, and since Council does not hold sole responsibility for any of the goals contained in the Strategy, process has significant influence on the ability for the Strategy to achieve its vision and outcome and impact. Figure 4 shows how these relationships were examined once the data had been analysed.

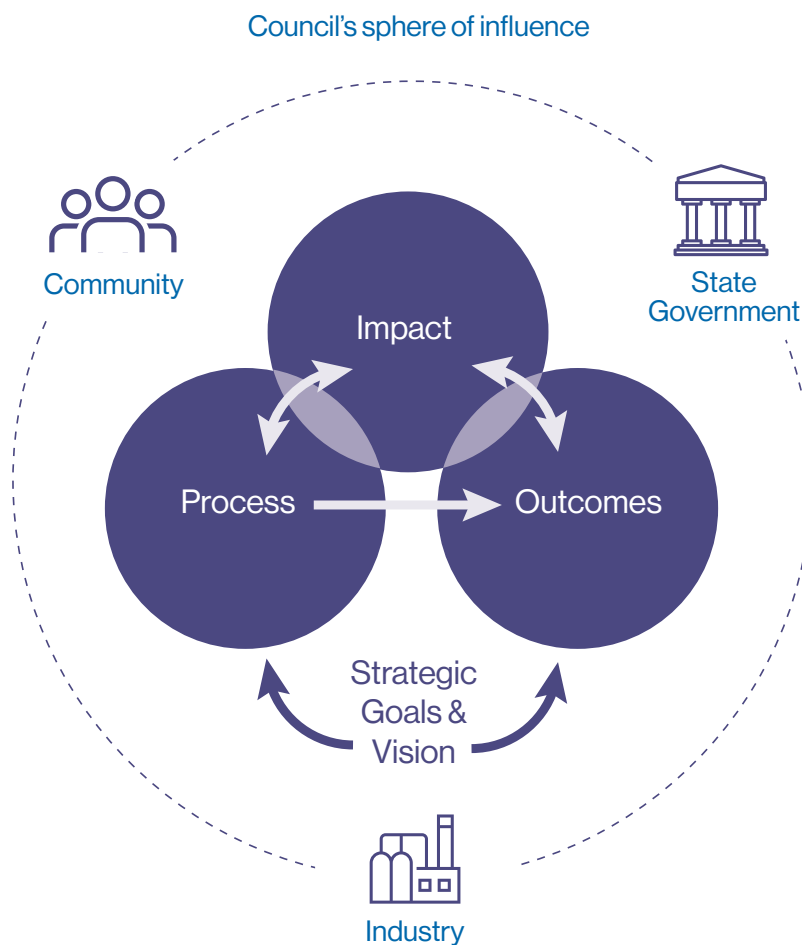


Figure 4: Process, impact and outcome relationships



To assess the achievement of the Strategy's vision, outcome statements were established for each goal withing the Evaluation Framework. Accordingly, progress is measured – as far as possible – using the criteria in Table 6.

Goal 1

Our iconic places and their natural character are actively protected.

Demonstrated by:

- The Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme has been used to conserve the community's places of value and significant landscapes.
- Parks, streetscapes and urban greening amenity value has been fostered through strategic planning initiatives and on-ground projects.
- Agricultural land has been preserved and sustainable farming practices encouraged.
- Cross tenure weed management undertaken with agencies and community.
- Strategic approach to pest animals developed.

Goal 2

Our water resource is improved and preserved.

Demonstrated by:

- Water quality for human consumption, agricultural use and healthy aquatic ecosystems has been protected.
- Applied best practice stormwater management to protect waterways.
- Minimised wastewater discharges to the environment.
- Protected and restored riparian zones and aquatic biodiversity.
- Minimised Yarra Ranges Council's potable water use.
- Promoted the sustainable use of groundwater and surface water.

Goal 3

Our native plants and animals, and their habitat is enhanced.

Demonstrated by:

- Protected existing vegetation and ecosystems that are functioning.
- Proactively rehabilitated and restored flora and fauna habitat.
- Protected threatened species and vegetation communities.
- Monitored vegetation loss and removal to ensure habitat levels didn't diminish.
- Further developed knowledge about flora and fauna assets and best practices.
- Strengthened strategic priorities for biodiversity improvements.

Goal 4

Our local economies are strengthened by environmentally sustainable activities.

Demonstrated by:

- Connected support mechanisms to local business, wanting to adopt environmentally sustainable business practices.
- Worked to attract assistance for the creation of new industry initiatives that reduce carbon dependency and encourage the adoption of cleaner energy sources.
- Supported nature based and farm-based tourism opportunities in the region.
- Worked with the agricultural sector to enhance agricultural practice and sustainability.

Goal 5

Our communities are resilient in the face of a changing climate and extreme events.

Demonstrated by:

- Built and maintained community infrastructure that is adaptable and can withstand extreme climate events.
- Promoted the adoption of sustainable building design and construction techniques across the municipality.
- Reduced Council's energy consumption and support the community to reduce theirs.
- Protected and mitigated against risk across the municipality through effective bushfire preparedness and emergency management activities.
- Supported community food production systems and local food supply chains and distribution networks.
- Advocated for sustainable transport options.
- Promoted regional independence and self-sustaining communities.

Goal 6

All who live and work in the Yarra Ranges see themselves as stewards of our environment.

Demonstrated by:

- Engaged with the community and provided environmentally focused education, support, resources and events.
- Supported local environmentally focused groups, by promoting and supporting good governance and capacity building.
- Encouraged environmentally sustainable choices for people's homes, properties and businesses.
- Supported and promote the development and use of nature-based recreation activities.
- Worked with community to share Indigenous land management knowledge.

Table 6: Goal outcome criteria

Method

The Strategy did not establish targets or outline specific metrics by which success could be determined. Therefore, to support the evaluation, several internal consultations and workshops were held with subject matter experts (SMEs) to determine what data existed that could provide a suitable measure for progress. Specifically, to demonstrate progress (or not) over time, data was identified that had – preferably annual- time intervals. This is, data that was held for a particular measure, and relevant to a specific goal, in 2016 at Strategy commencement (baseline), and that could then be compared with data from 2025 at Strategy closure.

This process provided a suite of data across over 100+ metrics. These are included in Appendix 2. Important to note is that not all these measures were used in the evaluation. Those that contained most relevance and currency to the evaluation question, and that held higher levels of validity and reliability, were examined.

SMEs were consulted throughout the evaluation process to ensure the representation of the data in the evaluation was accurate and that inferences and conclusions made after the data was analysed were sound.

A note on attribution

Environmental strategies typically involve long-term goals, spanning many years, and are influenced by numerous external factors (mostly) beyond the control of local governments. Pertinent to this evaluation, factors include:

- While the Yarra Ranges covers a total area of 244,700 hectares, only 2% is owned by Council. There is a further 30% that is in private ownership and the remaining 68% is Crown land. Therefore, Council's own land management practices are limited to this 2% and limits the overall ability to protect and sustain environments.
- With this limited ownership, clearly there are other agencies (State and Commonwealth), private enterprises and landowners that carry more responsibility (legislated and voluntary) and therefore impact for land management.
- As a responsible planning authority, a primary role for Council over the life of the Strategy has been to advocate for, and have influence over, flora and fauna protection, habitat management, restoration and enhancement. Measuring the impact of advocacy work is notoriously challenging, since it is rarely a single factor that brings the desired change or result.
- The Strategy has taken place over 10 years and has involved a significant number of activities and initiatives. These have mostly been undertaken in partnership with other agencies and organisations. Identifying the most important of these initiatives and /or players is neither feasible nor desirable, since most successful partnerships create synergy where the parts cannot be separated from the sum.

It is therefore important to note that within the scope of this evaluation there is no intention to measure the degree to which positive or negative change against the Strategy goals can be attributed to the Council initiatives. This does not, preclude the possibility of examining the degree to which Council initiatives might have contributed to change and /or progress – particularly through the many partnerships that are embedded in the programs, projects and activities Council undertakes.

Appendix 2: Impact Analysis

1 Sub-Strategies

The Strategy served as an umbrella framework, guiding the development of key sub-strategies focused on biodiversity, climate resilience, and tree canopy management, ensuring alignment across Council's environmental planning. The evaluation found that the Strategy strengthened and enabled success of these sub-strategies in the following ways.

Reinforcing and updating goals with specific targets and actions

The *Liveable Climate Plan (2020-2030)* introduces more rigorous emissions targets (e.g. net zero organisational emissions by 2040, 100% renewable electricity by 2030). This deepens Goal 5 - resilient communities in the face of climate change - and adds specificity and measurable milestones that the Strategy did not have.

The *Nature Plan 2024-2034* supports Goal 3 - native plants and animals protected / habitat enhanced - by providing updated metrics, resourcing, and a 10-year action plan. It enhances biodiversity commitments, that are more specific than those contained in the Strategy.

The *Stormwater Management Plan 2024-2034* and *Integrated Water Management Plan 2017-2022* directly address Goal 2 - water resources are improved and preserved – whilst *Tree Canopy Strategy 2024-2044* responds to Goal 1 - iconic places and their natural character are improved and actively protected. All collectively activate objectives around water quality, erosion, habitat connectivity, and urban heat mitigation.

Accordingly, these newer plans help to move the Strategy from vision and broad actions toward implementation with quantifiable and timed outcomes.

Updating risk, resilience, and climate adaptation

While the Strategy named climate resilience as a goal, other plans (e.g. Storm Water Management Plan, Climate Plan, Nature Plan) bring in updated risk assessment (hazards, flood risk, extreme events), up-to-date science, contemporary legislation, community expectations, and financial/technological feasibility.



For example, the *Stormwater Management Plan 2024-2034* provides updated guidelines, recognition of changing rainfall patterns, increased storm severity, and integrates design standards that can respond to those updated risks. The *Liveable Climate Plan* also includes operational resilience (e.g. energy backup, renewable sourcing) which helps with disruptions.

This ensured the Strategy remained relevant since many environmental conditions have changed since 2015, including climate change impacts, community demand, and regulatory expectations.

Under the Climate Change Act 2017, councils are required to 'have regard to climate change' when preparing a municipal public health and wellbeing plan under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008. The *Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025* has one of seven priorities dedicated to this being: Tackle climate change and its impact on health – Priority 2 – with the goal being to ensure 'people and businesses are resilient, prepared, and able to mitigate the potential health impacts of climate change'. The Firestick program and the My Energy and Water Saver Kits support this priority and goal.

Embedding accountability, monitoring and governance

While it was intended that the Strategy be reviewed every five years, the more recent plans and strategies bring with them more frequent and structured monitoring and reporting.

The Liveable Climate Plan is accompanied by an action plan, with emissions measured annually. Other plans (Nature Plan, Tree Canopy, Stormwater Management) come with measurable outcome indicators, which helps in tracking progress, adjusting course, and ensuring transparency. This addresses a key risk in long-term strategies, being loss of momentum over time.

Also, by having separate but connected plans, opportunities were enhanced for cross-departmental collaboration and for embedding environmental goals into multiple operational areas — transport, planning, asset management, water services.

Expanding scope

Some environmental themes, either underemphasised in 2015, or emerging since the Strategy was endorsed, are now better addressed by these newer strategies and plans. For example, urban heat / tree canopy is now a much more pressing issue and the Tree Canopy Strategy gives stronger direction here. Waste and circular economy was less central in 2015 where the Waste & Resource Recovery Strategy and the Economic Development Strategy bring in circular models, markets, and behaviour change, which support and strengthen the Strategy's sustainability goal. Transport emissions / mobility mode-shift is more prominent now as part of emissions reduction strategies and the Integrated Transport Strategy provides detailed levers.

Importantly, cultural governance and Traditional Owner partnerships, while included in the Strategy was far less emphasised in 2015 than it is today. These are now much more explicitly embedded through Council's Reconciliation Action Plan where there is a commitment and set of actions to ensure Aboriginal Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing and a strong cultural lens drive meaningful outcomes.

Economic and social co-benefits

A healthy environment and social and emotional well-being are interconnected. A healthy environment provided the necessary resources and conditions for both. The co-benefits include:

- **Improved Physical Health:** A healthy environment supports the maintenance of clean air, water, and soil, which are essential for preventing respiratory diseases, cardiovascular problems, and other health issues.
- **Enhanced Mental Health:** Exposure to natural environments can lead to reduced stress, improved mood, and lower risk of chronic diseases. Green spaces and forests provide opportunities for physical activity, social interaction, and relaxation, all of which contribute to overall health.
- **Social Connections:** A healthy environment promotes social interaction and a sense of belonging. Both are crucial for building strong relationships and improving community connections.
- **Emotional Well-being:** A healthy environment can help individuals feel better physically and emotionally, reducing stress, anxiety, and depression, and improving overall sense of well-being².

Further, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW 2022) suggests that addressing climate change is an opportunity to improve health outcomes, strengthen communities, and boost social and economic resilience. Whether reducing emissions (mitigation) or building community preparedness and resilience to climate risks and impacts (adaptation), there are health co-benefits associated with many climate actions across all sectors.

When actions are carefully designed, these health benefits can address social inequities by reducing risks and impacts to at-risk people, such as children, people over 65 years of age, people on low incomes, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, people who already have a medical condition, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Both mitigation and adaptation actions are needed to tackle climate change and planning them together is key. Importantly, AIHW reports that failing to invest in climate adaptation and mitigation actions can lead to greater economic and social costs that can affect health outcomes³.

These co-benefits highlight the importance of a healthy environment in promoting social and emotional well-being, and the need to protect and restore natural ecosystems to ensure a thriving environment for all. This was the stated intention of the Strategy in 2015, and it holds even greater currency in 2025.

The more recent strategies more overtly link environmental sustainability with economic development, health and wellbeing, community resilience, and cultural recognition.

For example, *Towards a Regenerative Yarra Ranges: Economic Development Strategy 2022-2032* positions sustainable business opportunities as part of environmental outcomes (employment, green tourism, recycled content industries). The Health and Wellbeing Plan ties environmental quality (clean air, green space, water, shade) to community health outcomes. There is also an opportunity (as identified by the Sustainable Environment Advisory Committee) to work on ways that co-benefits can be measured collaboratively in future strategies.

Such linkage strengthen stakeholder buy-in, support alignment and resource allocation and maintained the Strategy's contribution to a broader sustainability agenda.

2 Norris, T. (2020), 'Exploring how a clean, healthy environment improves well-being', National Civic Review, Vol. 109, No. 2.

3 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022) Benefits of the environment to health: A literature review of health benefits derived from 3 ecosystem services: air filtration, local climate regulation, and recreation, catalogue number PHE 311, AIHW, Australian Government



2 Partnerships

The evaluation found that partnerships have been critical to Strategy success.

[Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action \(EAGA\)](#)

This is a regional collaboration of eight councils to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and deliver climate adaptation programs. Established in 2008, the partnership has delivered the Victorian Energy Collaboration (VECO), the largest local government renewable energy project, enabling 100% renewable electricity for Yarra Ranges assets and saving approximately \$266k (from 2021–2025). The initiative also supports Solar Savers, Energy Savers, resilient asset investigations, FOGO emissions quantification, capacity building, advocacy, and submissions to government.

[Eastern Alliance for Sustainable Learning \(EASL\)](#)

This is a collaboration of seven councils to support educators and embed sustainability in schools and early years. Established in 2011, the partnership runs professional development, hosts the annual Learning for Sustainability Conference, and facilitates the Resource SmartSchools Program, embedding sustainability into school curriculum, campuses, and communities. As the only alliance of its kind in Victoria, EASL is an innovative model that leverages pooled resources and regional collaboration to achieve outcomes far beyond the reach of any single Council.

[Smart Water Network: Tanks for Platypus Project](#)

The partnership seeks to improve streamflow, waterway health, and platypus habitat in Monbulk Creek catchment through innovative water management. Partners include University of Melbourne, Melbourne Water, South-East Water, DEECA, YRC. The impact has been the installation of up to 300 real-time controlled tanks and managing open water bodies to support platypus populations, reduce potable water use, and manage nuisance flooding.

Landcare

Partnership with local Landcare groups for community-led restoration and conservation builds stewardship, supports biodiversity, weed control, revegetation, and engages volunteers in hands-on land management.

Melbourne Water stormwater management partnership

This is a joint program to address stormwater impacts on waterways. Commencing in 2022 and extended now until 2028, the partnership has delivered 48 roads with passive drainage, two raingardens, a stormwater harvesting system at Monbulk Recreation Reserve, and designs for two ephemeral wetlands. There are tangible on-ground improvements to stormwater management and waterway health.

Eastern transport coalition

This is an advocacy group of Eastern Metro Councils focused on improving sustainable and integrated transport. The group supports advocacy for improved public transport, reduced car dependency, and funding for regional transport projects.

Peri-Urban weed management partnership

This is a regional collaboration to manage invasive weeds in peri-urban landscapes, often across land tenures. The partnership has seen improvement in biodiversity protection, reducing the spread of invasive species, and coordinates investment in shared landscapes.

Alternative waste processing partnership

A regional partnership exploring alternatives to landfill for residential waste. The partnership supports the transition to a circular economy, reduces reliance on landfill, and advanced resource recovery technologies.

3 Flagship Projects

The evaluation shows clear gains in biodiversity management, waterway health, climate resilience, and sustainable economic practices, underpinned by innovative flagship projects and significant external investment.

Biochar facility (2023–ongoing)

The Biochar initiative involves the establishment of a facility that converts organic waste into biochar, a carbon-rich, soil-enhancing product. It aligns with Council's goals of circular economy, reducing landfill, and creating sustainable agricultural inputs. Partners include ECOSS and Earth Systems, highlighting collaboration between community organisations and technical experts.

Identified impacts include:

- **Waste reduction:** In its first year, the facility converted more than 250 tonnes of green waste into usable biochar, diverting material that would otherwise have gone to landfill.
- **Carbon sequestration:** By producing biochar, the project locks carbon into the soil for centuries, supporting climate change mitigation.
- **Soil health:** Local farmers and gardeners have reported improved soil structure and fertility from trial applications of biochar.
- **The site provides an educational resource** for schools, Landcare, and residents to learn about low-emission technologies, while the project demonstrates innovation in waste management and creates scalable pathways for environmental sustainability.

Yering billabongs restoration (2020–2025)

This project focuses on ecological restoration of the Yering Billabongs, a key wetland habitat. As a Council-led initiative, it seeks to rehabilitate degraded waterways, improve biodiversity corridors, and enhance community connection with local landscapes.

Identified impacts include:

- Biodiversity recovery: Replanting indigenous vegetation and stabilising riverbanks is improving waterbird and fish habitats.
- Water quality: The wetland acts as a natural filter, reducing sediment and nutrient runoff into connected waterways.
- Community engagement: Partnerships with local environmental volunteers and schools promote stewardship of the site.
- Cultural recognition: Work has included consultation with Traditional Owners to integrate cultural knowledge into land and water care.

Though early in delivery, the project represents a cornerstone for long-term ecological health in the municipality.

Biodiversity offset program (2012–ongoing)

The Biodiversity Offset Program aims to balance unavoidable development impacts with targeted conservation. By securing and managing offset sites, Council ensures no net loss of biodiversity while also creating long-term ecological value.

Identified impacts include:

- Habitat protection: Offset sites safeguard rare or threatened ecosystems that might otherwise face degradation.
- Compliance and leadership: The program strengthens Council's reputation as a leader in biodiversity management, going beyond minimum statutory requirements.
- Connectivity: Offset areas often link fragmented habitats, creating corridors that support species movement and resilience.

These sites provide co-benefits through educational and recreational opportunities while delivering ecosystem services such as carbon storage and water regulation.

The adaptation game (TAG) (2024–ongoing)

Launched in 2024, TAG is an innovative gamified tool co-designed by Amble Studios with local partners including Climate Council, universities, and community groups. It is designed to increase community awareness of climate risks and build local adaptive capacity.

Identified impacts include:

- Knowledge translation: Complex climate science is translated into engaging, accessible gameplay.
- Collaboration: TAG workshops bring together residents, business owners, and policymakers to identify local vulnerabilities and co-develop solutions.
- Empowerment: Participants report greater confidence in adapting to climate impacts at both household and community levels.
- Mainstreaming adaptation: The project positions Yarra Ranges as a leader in participatory climate action, influencing regional and national discourse.

TAG is less about infrastructure and more about social resilience, proving that behavioural and cultural shifts are as vital as physical adaptation measures.

[Ribbons of green \(2008–ongoing\)](#)

One of Council's longest-running programs, Ribbons of Green supports private landholders, Landcare groups, and Melbourne Water to revegetate land with indigenous species. It provides seedlings, technical advice, and coordination to restore landscapes across the municipality.

Identified impacts include:

- **Scale:** Since 2008, millions of plants have been established, creating extensive corridors for wildlife.
- **Carbon storage:** New vegetation contributes to Council's emission reduction targets by sequestering carbon.
- **Erosion control:** Planting stabilises soils, reducing land degradation and protecting waterways.
- **Community ownership:** By empowering landholders, the program embeds biodiversity outcomes across both public and private land.

Ribbons of Green is recognised as a flagship community-environment partnership with enduring benefits for biodiversity and climate.

[Energy and water saver kits \(2021–ongoing\)](#)

This program, through the local library service, distributes kits to households, enabling residents to save energy, water, and money. It is designed as an accessible entry point for sustainable living.

Identified impacts include:

- **Direct savings:** Households report lower utility bills after installing low-flow showerheads, draft stoppers, and efficient light globes.
- **Behaviour change:** Kits encourage everyday awareness of resource use.
- **Equity:** By targeting vulnerable households, the program ensures that sustainability benefits are shared inclusively.
- **Scalable model:** The approach can be replicated across other municipalities with minimal adaptation.

[Solar Savers \(2019–ongoing\)](#)

Solar Savers is a regional initiative assisting households, particularly low-income residents, to install rooftop solar systems through financial and technical support.

Identified impacts include:

- **Emission reduction:** Each system reduces household reliance on coal-based electricity, contributing to municipal carbon neutrality goals.
- **Cost savings:** Families report significant reductions in power bills, enhancing resilience to rising energy costs.
- **Equity and justice:** By focusing on low-income residents, the project addresses climate justice as well as climate action.
- **Market transformation:** By aggregating demand, the initiative lowers installation costs and builds local industry capacity.

Appendix 3: Outcome Findings in Detail

This section provides the analysis of the data sets developed to measure the degree to which each of the Strategy's goals have been achieved. As previously noted, the metrics contained in each table were identified from current reporting as 'best fit' for the goal and with the possibility of determining change over the life of the Strategy.

They were not specifically developed as a dedicated metric for the goal in 2015 and therefore are only a partial evidence base for determining success.

Importantly, while the lack of targets and metrics in the Strategy provide limitations on the methodology used in the evaluation, this analysis nonetheless does allow for reflection on past performance as a basis for better measuring future impact and outcomes.

The scoping out of metrics to give expression to the goals lead to a more dynamic and flexible methodology. Additional metrics, that might otherwise not have been considered had a 2015 Strategy and Evaluation Framework been too prescriptive, were included. This allowed for the complexity of the Strategy and the broader operating environment in which it existed to be accounted for as the story of the Strategy unfolded.

In the sections that follow there is a substantial amount of data. Importantly, where data was simply not available, this is stated. Where data was unavailable for certain years but reportable nonetheless, the years where there is missing data are blocked out.

Theme 1: Our Place, Our Healthy Landscapes

Goal 1: Protection of natural character and iconic places

This goal aimed to protect the natural character and iconic places found in rural landscapes, gardens, townships, mountain ranges and forests across the Yarra Ranges. Each of these was seen to contribute to our local heritage. This goal also aimed to recognise the value of non-native plants in urban and rural areas.

Specifically, the natural character of Yarra Ranges iconic places would be actively protected by:

- The Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme used to conserve the community's places of value and significant landscapes.
- Parks, streetscapes and urban greening amenity value fostered through strategic planning initiatives and on-ground projects.
- Agricultural land preserved and sustainable farming practices encouraged.
- Cross tenure weed management undertaken with agencies and community.
- A strategic approach to pest animals developed.

The best available data and metrics to measure the degree to which the natural character of Yarra Ranges iconic places were actively protected are contained in Table 7.

Metric	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
Weed Wipe-out Voucher Participation Source: Yarra Ranges Council	398	339	367	496	663	758	901	862	808	791
Incidents of dumped rubbish ⁴ Source: Yarra Ranges Council	Data availability from 22/23							1,603	2,010	2596
Cases of native vegetation clearance without a permit Source: Yarra Ranges Council	28	23	32	16	34	40	40	25	20	4
Planning permit applications received Source: Department Transport and Planning	1843	1724	1776	1416	1361	1523	1526	1332	1127	1139
Planning permits issued Source: Department Transport and Planning	1557	1568	1421	1348	1138	1301	1173	1091	993	990
No permit issued Source: Department Transport and Planning	272	171	212	220	213	191	246	263	277	228
Amended permit application Source: Department Transport and Planning	394	397	349	206	185	217	161	149	142	164
Tree Cover %	Insufficient data									
Street trees planted										
Urban Design Frameworks, Place Plans etc including greening initiatives Source: Yarra Ranges Council	No data available									
Agriculture Use Change - properties applying for farm rate ⁵ Source: Yarra Ranges Council	1877	1829	1798	1777	1737	1721	1686	1641	1599	1568
Agriculture Use Change - # of Businesses 'Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing' Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics					744	740	735	731	712	

Table 7: Goal 1 Metrics

⁴ Incidents of Dumped Rubbish (Requests relating to Dumped Rubbish/Syringes/Asbestos for roads, reserves, roadsides)

⁵ Decreasing number of farms which is impactful but unclear what the reasons are. Customers on the farm rate pay 70% of the residential rate, however the new Emergency Services Volunteer Fund charge cuts the discount in half

Analysis

Status: When examined against the available metrics, the evaluation finds Goal 1 was partially achieved.

Yarra Ranges Council assists residents in covering the cost of disposing of weeds through the Weed Wipeout tip voucher available for eligible weeds. For residents who wish to dispose of woody weeds, only foliage and smaller branches are accepted, while clean tree branches and limbs can be bundled and put out for bundled branch collection (see Goal 6).

Weed Wipe-out Voucher participation has shown strong growth over the life of the Strategy from 398 vouchers provided in 2015/16, peaking at 901 in 2021/22, and then dipping slightly to 791 in 2024/25. While, the data does not record vouchers redeemed, it does show strong community participation overall. While this supports protected environments, it also demonstrates that people living in the Yarra Ranges are increasingly becoming better stewards of their environments (Goal 6)

The reported incidences of illegal dumping of rubbish increased over the three years of reportable data (2022/23 → 2024/25). Incidents escalated from 1,603 to 2,596 over the 3 years suggesting persistent waste challenges.

This data needs further analysis since it is not clear if the number of dumping incidents has increased (undermining Goal 1 success) or reporting behaviour has strengthened as residents become better stewards of their environments (supporting Goal 6).

Analysis of the available data suggests:

- Dumping that is high-risk to health and safety requiring urgent specialist removal of asbestos and syringes as well as rubble and asbestos near waterways and broken glass hazards
- Chronic hotspots including Fussell Road, Kilsyth where there were 31 incidents in one year and Cavehill Road, Lilydale where there was repeated dumping outside an elderly residents' home causing distress
- Large-scale dumping – for example at the Warburton Trail access points washing machines, tyres, and furniture have been repeatedly dumped
- Dumping at community facilities directly affecting reserves, halls, and recreation areas. For example, at the Narre Warren East Recreation Reserve where deer carcasses and household rubbish have been left
- Frequent dumping on nature strips (e.g. Albert Hill Rd, North Rd, Oliver St, Beresford Rd, Mooroolbark/Hull Rd) of household goods (e.g. like mattresses, couches, chairs).
- Over the life of the Strategy there has been on average 28-30 annual cases of vegetation removal without a permit across the municipality. It is not clear from the data the extent of land cleared; however the consistency of cases shows the persistence of the problem of illegal vegetation removal.
- Planning permit applications decreased from 1,843 in 2015/16 → 1,139 in 2024/25 as did the number of permits issued (1,557 → 990). The number of amended permit application also greatly reduced. Taken together, these metrics suggest there is reduced development pressure but also limited new activity.

It is important to note that in December 2022 the Amendment C148 was introduced into the Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme.

Amendment C148 introduced an Environmentally Sustainable Development local policy, requiring the incorporation of sustainable design techniques in major new developments. It also includes

a set of new Significant Landscape Overlays that contain design guidelines for new development in Green Wedge areas to protect significant landscapes, and new Environmental Significance Overlay that identifies the important biodiversity habitats in Yarra Ranges and provides targeted controls to protect these areas.

This significantly increases the potential for future planning to protect the natural character and iconic places within Yarra Ranges.

In identifying metrics that could demonstrate the degree to which Yarra Ranges iconic places and their natural environments were actively protected over the life of the Strategy, changes in agricultural use were deemed to have utility value. Two measures were pinpointed being properties applying for the 30% farm rate discount from rates notices, and the number of agricultural businesses as reported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Notably, both metrics declined over the life of the Strategy. Properties applying for farm rate discount dropped (16.5%) from 1,877 in 2015/16 to 1,568 in 2024/25, while the number of agricultural businesses decreased from 744 to 712 (5.5%) over a five-year period from 2019/20 to 2023/24.

While the reasons for the declines are not known, though rising land/house prices, changing markets, increased regulatory pressures etc. no doubt have had an effect. Both metrics are deemed to be important measures for determining the degree to which the natural character and places within Yarra Ranges are being protected.

Further, the number of hectares of agriculture land improved by sustainable and regenerative practices could not be determined, though stakeholders suggest that anecdotally, there has been a growing interest in this space. Melbourne Water have been building capacity in this space with landowners, particularly through the Rural Land Program and Catchment Management Authority (CMA) related initiatives. This includes a project writing sustainable use management plans for large properties.

Landcare have also been running farm visits and workshops on pasture management, fencing arrangement, water retention and dam restoration. A growing number of livestock farmers are moving into less stock, rotational grazing, long pasture/mixed native pasture management. Eco Vineyards and Ribbons of Green have been instrumental in working with vineyards to move into using native cover crops and deliberate vegetated zones for beneficial insect habitat.

In 2019, Yarra Ranges, Cardinia Shire Council and Melbourne Water ran a 'Managing Your Rural Property' conference with a focus on regenerative agriculture principles.

While changes in the percentage of tree canopy coverage and street trees planted were determined as two potential metrics for Goal 1, there is currently limited information available that can measure change over time. However, it should be noted that in 2024 Council approved the *Tree Canopy Strategy 2024-2044*. The vision for the strategy is to:

"Conserve and enhance our leafy character, culturally significant landscapes and unique biodiversity through the protection, management and planting of trees. Our tree canopy will improve liveability, support community health and wellbeing, maintain ecosystems and enhance local tourism".

The *Tree Canopy Strategy* has targets that include Increasing tree canopy cover from 31.68% to 35% on public land in built up areas, provide a minimum of 25% tree canopy cover on public land across all suburbs and towns and increase tree canopy cover for all activity centres, key

pedestrian routes, playspaces and biolinks between areas with recognised biodiversity value. This will in turn increase the diversity and resilience of Council managed trees.

Further, the evaluation has noted that illegal vegetation removal is happening and while the number of cases had remained steady (overall) there is no data on the number of hectares cleared. This is critical data that needs both recording and analysing and can contribute greater depth of analysis in changes to tree canopy cover.

Interpretation

Weed management is improving and iconic places are supported through planning, but illegal dumping and vegetation removal, alongside a declining agricultural base might be undermining long-term landscape protection.

Best metrics

The following are recommended as best metrics for future environment strategies:

- Weed wipe-out voucher participation (or similar) as it is a strong proxy for community involvement and stewardship in land care.
- Incidents of dumped rubbish as a clear indicator of focussed waste management strategies that might include strengthened enforcement and deterrence through surveillance, higher penalties, and community awareness campaigns.
- Agricultural use change as an indicator that monitors the degree to which natural character and environments are being protected and even enhanced.
- Collect consistent tree canopy cover data to track greening outcomes – as reported against the targets in the *Tree Canopy Strategy 2024-2044*.
- More detailed information on illegal native vegetation removal to better understand the scale and impact of the issue to inform enforcement and strengthen accountability.

Goal 2: Preservation and improvement of water resources

This goal aimed to protect the quality and quantity of water moving through the municipality. Water is needed for our aquatic ecosystems, human consumption, recreational uses and agricultural activity.

Specifically, water resources would be preserved and improved our water resources by:

- Protecting water quality for human consumption, agricultural use and healthy aquatic ecosystem.
- Applying best practice stormwater management to protect waterways. Minimising wastewater discharges to the environment.
- Protecting and restoring riparian zones and aquatic biodiversity.
- Minimising Yarra Ranges Council's potable water use.
- Promoting the sustainable use of groundwater and surface water.

The best available data and metrics to measure the degree to which water resources were preserved and improved are contained in Table 8.

Metric and Source	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
Water Quality Monitoring - Yarra River Upper at O'Shannassy River, Warburton East Source: Melbourne Water	9.5	9.08	9.5	8.25	7.83					
Nitrogen (Tonnes) in Yarra River Upper (Rural) Source: DEECA		20		6.4	7.2	6.55	4.62	10.36	11.28	
Water Quality Monitoring - Woori Yallock Creek, Woori Yallock Source: Melbourne Water	6.17	5.33	4.92	3.67	4.5					
Nitrogen (Tonnes) in Woori Yallock Creek Source: DEECA		1.1		0.21	0.17	0.12	0.08	0	0	
High quality riparian vegetation -Average Yarra Catchment Yarra Ranges Source: Melbourne Water	245			1477						
Weight Nitrogen Removed through WSUD (kg) – annually Source: Yarra Ranges Council	283	284	287	300	303	303	342	343	343	343
Number of WSUD assets (cumulative) Source: Yarra Ranges Council	102	109	117	126	128	131	136	137	138	138
WSUD area Source: Yarra Ranges Council	Data not available									
Volume of alternative water use – capacity Source: Yarra Ranges Council	2 ML/y	2 ML/y	2 ML/y	2 ML/y	2 ML/y	4 ML/y	4 ML/y	4 ML/y	7 ML/y	8 ML/year
Tanks for Platypus data Source: Yarra Ranges Council								3	-	10
Rehabilitated billabongs and wetlands Source: Yarra Ranges Council	Data from the Yering Billabong Project Acquittal was accessed and reported acquittal									
Water Use in Yarra Ranges (estimated consumption ML) Source: Yarra Valley Water	12334	12194	12056	12120	12193	11971	11771	11695	11743	
Council potable water use (kL) (317 facilities) Source: Yarra Ranges Council	202855	175632	175,133	190638	175908	180606	219470	191178	198093	207,680

Table 8: Goal 2 Metrics

Analysis

Status: When examined against the available metrics, the evaluation finds Goal 2 was mostly achieved.

Water quality data⁶ was available only from 2015-20 and for Yarra River Upper showed a decline in water quality from 9.5 (excellent) in 2015 to 7.83 (good) in 2020. For the Woori Yallock Creek there was also a decline from fair to poor over the same period.

A further measure of water quality is measuring the levels of nitrogen in the water system. Yarra River Upper nitrogen levels improved from 20 tonnes in 2015/16 to 11.28 tonnes in 2021/22, and Woori Yallock Creek nitrogen reduced from 1.1 tonnes to zero by 2021/22.

Water-sensitive urban design (WSUD) is a land planning and engineering design approach which integrates the urban water cycle, including stormwater, groundwater, and wastewater management and water supply, into urban design to minimise environmental degradation and improve aesthetic and recreational appeal.

WSUD nitrogen removal rose steadily from 283 kg in 2015/16 to 343 kg annually by 2022/23). WSUD assets also increased from 102 to 138 in 2025.

In terms of water use, municipal consumption declined from 12,334 ML in 2015/16 to 11,743 ML in 2023/24. Council potable use fluctuated, peaking at 219,470 kL in 2021/22 but stabilising around 198,093–207,680kL more recently across 317 facilities.

It is recognised that while there is some influence Yarra Ranges can have on consumption and potable water use, there are factors that are beyond Council's control. For example, leaks at reserves, aquatic centres and low rainfall all have a significant influence on usage.

Two initiatives that support the Yarra Ranges care for preserving and improving water resources are Tanks for Platypus and the Yering Billabong Project. Further the investigations and installation of stormwater harvesting systems to irrigate sports fields, such as the systems Pinks Reserve (installed in 2020), and Monbulk Recreation Reserve (installed in 2023), save millions of litres of potable mains water, reduce polluted stormwater runoff to local creeks and improve resilience of local infrastructure.

Interpretation

Nitrogen reduction is strong and WSUD expansion is critical. Stable water use demonstrates achievement, though Council consumption spikes highlight inconsistency and needs a focussed approach to monitoring and reporting for continuous improvement.

Best metrics

Noting Council does not have full responsibility for the delivery of this goal but works in partnership with other agencies and organisations that hold primary responsibility metrics might include.

- Nitrogen loads (Yarra River & Woori Yallock Creek) as sensitive, outcome-focused water quality measure.
- WSUD assets and nitrogen removal as a tangible infrastructure-driven outcomes.
- Council potable water use for accountability for organisational leadership.
- Alternative Water source capacity tracked annually

⁶ The Water Quality Index (WQI) is a composite score that simplifies complex water quality data into a single number, making it easier to understand the overall health of a waterway. Melbourne Water uses this index to assess and communicate the condition of rivers, creeks, and other water bodies. It is a clear metric for measuring the degree to which Yarra Ranges water resources are improved and preserved. The closer the score is to 10, the better the water quality.



- Improve monitoring frequency and transparency for riparian vegetation health and aquatic biodiversity.

Goal 3: Protection of native plants and animals and their habitats

This goal aimed to preserve unique and indigenous ecosystems, remnant vegetation, and threatened species and communities. By protecting natural environment and promoting a range of self-sustaining ecosystems, the quality and long-term sustainability of Yarra Ranges' biodiversity is enhanced.

Native plants and animals are protected, and their habitat is enhanced by:

- Protecting existing vegetation and ecosystems that are functioning.
- Proactively rehabilitating and restoring flora and fauna habitat.
- Protecting threatened species and vegetation communities.
- Monitoring vegetation loss and removal to ensure habitat levels didn't diminish.
- Further developing knowledge about flora and fauna assets and best practices.
- Strengthening strategic priorities for biodiversity improvements.

The best available data and metrics to measure the degree to which native plants and animals are protected, and their habitat is enhanced are contained in Table 9.

Metric and Source	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
# Deer controlled by partners Source: Yarra Ranges Council										4,150
# ha of land with deer control Council Program Source: Yarra Ranges Council								8,600	25,000	30,000
# ha of land with deer control partner programs Source: Yarra Ranges Council										315,000
# Deer Controlled Council Program Source: Yarra Ranges Council								21	362	335
Ribbons of Green #plants Source: Yarra Ranges Council	29,080	44,480	34,000	29,300	38,920	57,370	75,000	72,000	62,000	70,160
Bushland Reserve # plants Source: Yarra Ranges Council								37,295	70,575	105,000
Gardens for Wildlife # plants Source: Yarra Ranges Council	N/A	70	430	170	0	80	210	750	1,040	1,250
Council Project Environment Assessment Referrals Source: Yarra Ranges Council	113	101	118	65	76	135	169	168	151	137
Weed data - cross tenure/Private Land (ha) Source: Yarra Ranges Council								0	893	893
Weed data - Council Bushland Reserves Source: Yarra Ranges Council	In 2015/16 the Weed Cover data was: <5% - 20% 5-25% - 31% 25-50% - 28% >50% - 21%					In 2024/25 the Weed Cover data was: <5% - 27% 5-25% - 34% 25-50% - 20% >50% - 19%				
Vegetation increased on private land through Greening Australia/alternative pathways Source: Yarra Ranges Council	Two key projects planned but not delivered yet through Greening Australia (Chandon Estate, YVW Upper Yarra Treatment Plant). Could seek some data from MW and Landcare/Beyond Yellingbo.									
Covenanted Land										
Permitted vegetation removal - hectares (planning approvals) Source: Yarra Ranges Council	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	5	5.4	6.4	4.5	4.2	7.5 ⁷

Metric and Source	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
Permitted vegetation removal - large trees (planning approvals) Source: Yarra Ranges Council	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	41	27	47	34	30	48 ⁸
Vegetation (hectares) removed for Council Works under Code/Road Safety Exemption Source: Yarra Ranges Council	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.401	1.546	0.846	2.896	0.892	0.276
Offsets issued through the Biodiversity Offsets Program \$\$ Source: Yarra Ranges Council	\$22,212	\$27,450	\$20,280	\$139,855	\$333,059	\$334,306	\$389,891	\$281,619	\$145,341	\$129,811
Offsets issued through the Biodiversity Offsets Program (units) Source: Yarra Ranges Council	0.165	0.203	0.150	1.036	2.467	2.476	2.888	2.086	1.077	0.962
Vegetation Cover %										
Nesting Boxes Source: Yarra Ranges Council							96	154	252	288
Conservation Value of Bushland Reserves Source: Yarra Ranges Council	Conservation Rating in 2015 was Very High - 18% High - 23% Medium - 36% Low: 23%						Conservation Rating in 2025 is Very High - 24% High - 23% Medium - 35% Low - 18%			
Land Management Plans requested for planning Applications Source: Yarra Ranges Council										37
Council led Cultural/Ecological Burns conducted Source: Yarra Ranges Council									1	1

Table 9: Goal 3 Metrics

Analysis

Status: When examined against the available metrics, the evaluation finds Goal 3 is partially achieved.

Yarra Ranges Council set an impressive goal with its “Ribbons of Green” program. The aim of the program is to improve landscape connectivity, ecosystem function and climate resilience in Yarra Ranges through habitat creation and protection, as well as foster environmental stewardship in the Yarra Ranges community and build resilience in farming properties through mutually beneficial biodiversity plantings. The program conserves and increases habitat for rare and threatened species and plant communities.

Objectives include:

- 50,000 indigenous tubestock planted on private properties, Council land and schools per annum. The selection of plants is based on local provenance and using Ecological Vegetation Communities (EVC) for the respective site to identify what would naturally occur at the site and selecting plants that match.
- Increase private landholders understanding of ecosystem function on their property and across the landscape through provision of expertise, training and linking to other agencies, Landcare and resources
- Targeted contact with 30 private landholders in strategic landscape connectivity gaps and vulnerable or threatened EVC's per annum
- Provide biodiversity extension and/or plant vouchers to private properties that do not meet the requirements of the broader revegetation program
- Support landholders in protecting remnant vegetation on their land through fencing and/or weed control
- Work with farmers and viticulturists to achieve property benefits incorporating natural systems into their production
- Research and implement strategies to enhance habitat resilience in a changing climate.
- The program has expanded year -on-year from 29,080 planting in 2015/16 to 70,160 in 2024/25 with over 500,000 plants planted across the life of the Strategy.
- The Yarra Ranges Gardens for Wildlife (G4W) program assists residents to develop a garden (or an area within their garden) to support local wildlife. The program is run by Council and a team of local volunteers who share their expertise and enthusiasm for wildlife gardening. Being free to join and open to Yarra Ranges residents the program supports participants by providing an information pack (digital format), and the ability to book a garden guide who will visit their property and provide suggestions and a voucher for free indigenous plants. Participants can also join the G4W Facebook group where they can share their experience with others. In 2016/17 there were 70 participants, and excepting for the COVID 19 years there has been a steady increase with 1,250 participants in 2024/25.
- Bushland Reserve plantings grew to 105,000 in 2024/25. Gardens for Wildlife participants rose to 1,250 in 2024/25.
- In terms of deer control, Council removed 21 deer in 2021/22, rising to 362 in 2022/23, and partners managed 4,150 deer by 2024/25 with 315,000 hectares of land with deer control partner program in 2025 (the only year where data is available)
- Weed cover improved modestly (very low cover <5% areas increased from 20% in 2015/16 → 27% in 2024/25).
- Approved vegetation removal increased to 7.5 hectares in 2024/25 from 5 hectares in

2019/20, and large tree removals fluctuated from 2019/20 peaking at 48 in 2024/25.

- Biodiversity offsets expanded dramatically over the life of Strategy from \$22,212 in 2015/16 to \$389,891 in 2021/22, though declining since to \$129,811 in 2024/25 (likely due to exhaustion of the current offset supply). The unit offsets also showed similar fluctuations over the life of the Strategy from 0.165 in 2015 to 0.962 in 2025 with a peak of 2.888 in 2022.
- The conservation value of bushland reserves had a conservation rating of 41% for high and very high combined in 2015/16 and has improved to 47% for high and very high in 2024/25.
- In 2021 the Yarra Ranges Council has activated the Nest Box Program, which aims to support native wildlife by installing nest boxes and artificial hollows. 96 new nesting boxes were installed across six sites in response to the 2021 storm, which caused significant tree loss.
- The program includes a combination of 3D printed nest boxes and artificial hollows to provide homes for various species, such as possums and gliders. Volunteers and local environmental groups are invited to help monitor these sites, collecting data to improve future habitat provisions. The initiative is part of a broader effort to restore habitats lost during the storm and to support local fauna.
- Since 2021, an additional 184 nesting boxes have been added to the program making the total for the four years 288 boxes. The program supports the proactive rehabilitating and restoring flora and fauna habitat and protection of threatened species and vegetation communities – key outcomes of Goal 3.

Interpretation

Increased habitat restoration and conservation ratings are positive, as is the planting through the Ribbons of Green program, but ongoing permitted vegetation loss (and unpermitted losses detailed under Goal 1) could be deemed offset these gains.

The strategies for protecting native plants and animals and enhancing their habitats are in place. Increased focus is required to proactively and strategically rehabilitate and restore flora and fauna habitat and protect threatened species and vegetation communities. As noted earlier, monitoring vegetation loss and removal to ensure habitat levels do not diminish need to be strengthened.

The evaluation notes the establishment of the Nature Plan 2024 – 2024 and the four targeted strategies (and associated action plan), being:

- Landscapes and Ecosystems: Understanding local biodiversity enhances resilience and connectivity, enabling ecosystems to flourish.
- Land Use and Changing Climate: Best practice land management through integrated planning and stewardship.
- Pest Plants and Animals: Managing pest plants and animals to reduce their impacts
- People and Nature: empowering community to connect with culture and nature.

Actions focus on mitigating threats - including habitat loss, pest animals and weed invasion, development pressure, stormwater impacts, bushfire and extreme weather events.

Key steps towards this will include:

- Development and implementation of a Council Biolinks Plan. This will be a roadmap for the re-connection of habitat through the Yarra Ranges landscape.
- Expanding our biodiversity extension programs and providing our community access to education, advice, support and incentives to get involved.
- Collecting detailed information on vegetation removal (illegal and legal) to inform progress towards goals).

- Monitoring programs to ensure environmental decisions are evidence based and adaptive.
- Embedding indigenous cultural practices into how we manage our natural environment.

Critical to the success of the Nature Plan is collaboration with those that share responsibility for protection and enhancement of our natural environment (e.g. community, agency partners and other land managers).

Best metrics

- Ribbons of Green plantings and G4W participation is a good indicator of habitat restoration.
- The monitoring and reporting of the actions in the Nature Plan 2024-2034.
- Conservation value of bushland reserves is a strong outcome-oriented biodiversity measure.
- Numbers of nesting boxes added each year as a key metric to rehabilitating and restoring flora and fauna habitat and the protection of threatened species and vegetation communities.
- Permitted and unpermitted vegetation removal (hectares/trees) allows for the tracking of habitat pressures.

Further, some thought could be given to scaling up pest animal management programs with stronger partnerships and community reporting tools, as well as establishing mandatory offset ratios for vegetation removal to ensure no net loss, and accounting for ecosystem services that are costly to replace with infrastructure solutions. Strategies are required to ensure vegetation cover is tracked annually to measure change and mechanisms to improve cross-tenure weed control outside of the Dandenong Ranges.

Theme 2: Thriving Communities

Goal 4: Strengthened local economies through environmentally sustainable activities

This goal aimed to support environmentally sustainable business activities and business models across a range of sectors in the Yarra Ranges. The goal is based on an assumption that economies that can use resources wisely by reducing waste and conserving or using less water and energy are more efficient and financially more robust.

Environmentally sustainable activities in local economies will be strengthened by:

- Connecting support mechanisms to local business, wanting to adopt environmentally sustainable business practices.
- Working to attract assistance for the creation of new industry initiatives that reduce carbon dependency and encourage the adoption of cleaner energy sources.
- Supporting nature based and farm-based tourism opportunities in the region.
- Working with the agricultural sector to enhance agricultural practice and sustainability.

The best available data and metrics to measure the degree to which environmentally sustainable activities in local economies were strengthened are contained in Table 10.

Metric and Source	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
Capacity Building workshops/sessions/visits for private property owners Source: Yarra Ranges Council	4	4	49	1- Farming Solutions for a Changing Climate + G4H events & 4 planned engagements	1- Deer Forum +G4H +1 planned engagements	1- Common weeds of Yarra Ranges +G4H +1 planned engagements	G4H events only + 2 planned engagements	1- Healthy Horses, Healthy Land +G4H + 2 planned engagements	2- Pest Preparedness Workshop x 2 +G4H + 2 planned engagements	4 - Queensland Fruit Fly etc +G4H +3 planned engagements
EUAs - cumulative not new each year Source: Yarra Ranges Council				3	7	7	9	12	13	11
BESS Assessments/ESD referrals Source: CASBE/BESS						13	33	42	44	82
Upper Yarra Development Strategy Source: Yarra Ranges Council	Yarra Ranges Council has received funding to help progress the Upper Yarra Local Development Strategy Project. This will help assist Warburton, Yarra Junction and Powelltown communities create new industries that will deliver jobs and economic growth as they transition away from native forest harvesting,									
Environmental themed Local Business support programs Source: Yarra Ranges Council	No data									
Local suppliers engaged by Council Source: Yarra Ranges Council				223	485	428	397 out of 2,185	425 out of 2,518	449 out of 2,866	406 out of 3,248
Spend with local suppliers Source: Yarra Ranges Council				\$31,115,145	\$29,225,379	\$25,966,776	\$41,151,761	\$43,169,535	\$45,001,626	\$44,738,490
Environmentally themed community led events Source: Yarra Ranges Council	No data available									
Local experts employed at environmental events Source: Yarra Ranges Council				27	27	27	26	14	14	30

Table 10: Goal 4 Metrics

Analysis

Status: When examined against the available metrics, the evaluation finds Goal 4 is showing progress.

Capacity building workshops, sessions and visits to private property owners has remained a constant activity over the life of the Strategy. There have generally been workshops on a quarterly basis for the 10 years the Strategy has been in place and themes have broadened and been inclusive of climate challenges, pest control, weed management, healthy land etc.

Importantly, since 2018/19 there have been on average 24 local experts that have been employed each year at environmental events.

The Built Environment Sustainability Scorecard (BESS) is an assessment tool created by local governments in Victoria. It assists builders and developers to show how a proposed development demonstrates sustainable design, at the planning permit stage. BESS assessments grew substantially from 13 in 2019/20 (first available data) to 82 in 2023/24 suggesting strong sustainable development uptake.

Environmental Upgrade Agreements (EUAs) are innovative financing mechanisms designed to facilitate the financing of environmental upgrades in existing buildings. They allow building owners to repay loans for upgrades through a local council charge on the land, making it easier to access capital for projects that improve energy, water, and resource efficiency. Councils can implement EUAs, but it is voluntary and depends on local decision-making.

EUAs increased to 13 cumulative by 2021/22 and are helping to promote sustainability in communities.

Engagement with local suppliers has remained strong though shows some fluctuation in number from a peak of 485 in 2019/20 → 406 in 2024/25. Spend has risen steadily from \$31.1million in 2018/19 to \$45 million in 2021/22 and showing stabilisation at \$44.7 million in 2024/25.

The *Upper Yarra Development Strategy* is a critical piece in the assessment of Goal 4.

In 2022, Yarra Ranges Council (YRC) was successful in applying to State Government to become one of the organisations to host a Local Development Strategy project for the Upper Yarra, with a focus on the communities of Yarra Junction, Warburton and Powelltown.

The preparation of the Local Development Strategy has been locally led and undertaken in partnership with key stakeholders. The purpose of the Local Development Strategy is to assist communities directly affected by the Victorian Forestry Plan to develop a local development strategy that supports their transition from commercial native timber harvesting, leading to the creation of new jobs in sustainable industries, and resulting in long-term economic and social benefits for each community.

The project is set to be completed in 2027 and will be a cornerstone project demonstrating how locally-led initiatives can support sustainable economies – especially those in transition from less sustainable economies.

Importantly, Yarra Ranges latest *Economic Development Strategy 2022-2032* has embraced the principles and practices of a regenerative economy – that is, moving away from extractive business models and moving towards economies that have the potential for positive contributions for nature and society. The strategy, titled *Towards and regenerative Yarra Ranges* is less concerned with growth for growth's sake, and more concerned with building a sustainable economy which purposefully meets the needs of both people and the environment.

This will mean measuring the degree to which local economies are strengthening, and being strengthened by, environmentally sustainable activities will have significant focus over the next decade.

Interpretation

Business engagement and sustainable referrals are growing and forward-facing strategies suggest this goal has a real focus moving forward for Council. However, with few concrete metrics and limited data available, it is more challenging looking back and determining the degree of success – or not.

Best metrics

- BESS assessments and ESD referrals are a strong, forward-looking indicator of sustainable building uptake.
- Spend with local suppliers allows for tracking both local economic benefit and sustainable procurement
- Monitoring and reporting sustainable business practices across the supply chain which can be strengthened and reported through Council procurement processes
- Capacity-building workshops delivered, attendance and breadth of topics are a reasonable proxy for engagement with landowners and businesses.

Goal 5: Communities are more resilient and protected in the face of changing climate and extreme events

This goal aimed to prepare communities for a changing climate, fires, floods and drought. The preparation aimed to minimise financial, social and environmental impacts on Council's infrastructure and services.

Resilient and protected communities will be developed by:

- Building and maintaining community infrastructure that is adaptable and can withstand extreme climate events.
- Promoting the adoption of sustainable building design and construction techniques across the municipality.
- Reducing Council's energy consumption and support the community to reduce theirs.
- Protecting and mitigating against risk across the municipality through effective bushfire preparedness and emergency management activities.
- Supporting community food production systems and local food supply chains and distribution networks.
- Advocating for sustainable transport options.
- Promoting regional independence and self-sustaining communities.

The best available data and metrics to measure the degree to which communities are more resilient and protected in the face of changing climate and extreme events are contained in Table 11.

Metric and Source	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
Council GHG Emissions (tCO2e) Source: Yarra Ranges Council	14,161	13,979	13,610	12,336	9,520	11,120	10,849	8,551	8,593	
Solar Panel Systems Installed on Council buildings Source: Yarra Ranges Council	There are currently 75 systems with total capacity of approximately 1591kw									
	3	3	21	11	7	7	11	5	3	4
Lighting upgrades completed Council Buildings Source: Yarra Ranges Council									9 sites	7 sites
Solar panel installations (community) No of systems Source:				1,233	1,320	1,492	1,730	1,489	1,494	
Hot water upgrades completed (community) Source:				154	173	149	132	80	63	
Battery storage systems installed Council Buildings Source: Yarra Ranges Council	Total of 17 systems with total storage capacity of 1270kWh									
						4	1	1	3	8
My Energy and Water Savings Kits data Source: Your Library and Yarra Ranges Council							In 2021 there were 3 kits in circulation and the follow year 10 more kits were available and borrowed 120 times. As at 2024/25 there are 22 kits, borrowed 725 times and with a further 78 people waiting to borrow. Demand is high.			
EVs in Council fleet Source: Yarra Ranges Council				2	2	2	2	2	2	10
EV chargers at Council assets Source: Yarra Ranges Council			1	1	1	1	1	1	3	13 ¹⁰
Preparing Australian Communities evaluation Source: Nation Partners Evaluation	See Case Study 1 (page **)									
From Recovery to Resilience Evaluation	Not available									
The Adaptation Game Develop & plays Source: Yarra Ranges Council	In 2024/25 there were 16 staff trained as facilitators, 16 kits purchased, 150 staff participated as players, 50 community members participated in five games across Sept 24 to June 2025.									
Emergency Management Township Plans Source: Yarra Ranges Council									2	3
Fire Hazard Inspection Notices Source: Yarra Ranges Council	No data available									

¹⁰ There are 10 at Civic, one located at Monbulk, and two located at Yarra Junction (1 x 50kW DC with two ports).

Metric and Source	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
Roadside Slashing Source: Yarra Ranges Council	600 roads	670 roads	Additions of roads not tracked at a yearly level							2500km for 850 roads
Roadside Fuel Reduction Source: Yarra Ranges Council	7-11kms fuel reduced each year									
Emergency management groups - groups per region Source: Yarra Ranges Council	Currently there are 17 groups in the Hills region, nine in the Upper Yarra, four in the Valley and one in the urban region. Some groups have been around in existence since (and prior to) the commencement of the Strategy, whereas others established themselves more recently. Engagement with Council varies.									
GHG emissions Community Source: Snapshot by Ironbark Sustainability				139,3000	133,4000	123,7000	124,6000	120,800		
Hot water upgrades completed on Council buildings (no of sites) Source: Yarra Ranges Council									2	6

Table 11: Goal 5 Metrics

Analysis

Status: When examined against the available metrics, the evaluation finds Goal 5 is partially achieved.

GHG emissions have been significantly reduced by 40% with 14,16 tonnes of CO₂e produced in 2015/16 and then steadily declining to 8,593 tonnes of CO₂e in 2023/24. And GHG emissions reducing in the community from 1,390,000 tonnes in 2018/19 to 1,200,000 tonnes in 2022/23

Council solar capacity reached 1,591 kW across 75 systems; community solar expanded to 1,730 systems in 2021/22 before stabilising to almost 1,500 systems per annum for the next two years.

Council's commitment to electric vehicles (EV) is demonstrated from an initial two to 10 by 2024/25. These are supported by the installation of 13 charging. Council also purchased two Battery Electric Vehicles (BEVs) in 2018/2019, seven new BEVs were then procured in 2025, One electric ride on mower was purchased for Lillydale Lake. Three Hino Hybrid tipper trucks were purchased in the 2022 fiscal year and two more in 2023 and one more in 2024. In 2022 Council replaced one LPG forklift with an electric version and in 2023 replaced a second. Five hybrid passenger vehicles were purchased over the last decade.

The Adaptation Game engaged 150 staff and 50 community members in 2024/25 and is doing so:

- Enhanced understanding of climate impacts: By engaging with simulated climate shocks, participants gain a deeper understanding of potential challenges, fostering proactive adaptation strategies.
- Strengthened community collaboration: The game's team-based approach encourages collective problem-solving, building social cohesion and a shared commitment to resilience.
- Provided practical experience in climate adaptation: Participants apply theoretical knowledge to practical scenarios, bridging the gap between learning and real-world application.
- Identified vulnerabilities and solutions: The simulation helps communities pinpoint their most vulnerable sectors and collaboratively develop targeted adaptation measures.
- Empowerment and capacity building: By actively participating in the adaptation process, community members are empowered with the skills and confidence to implement effective climate resilience actions.

My Energy and Water Savings Kits experienced increasing demand with just three kits in 2021 to 22 kits by 2025, borrowed 725 times, and at the time of writing there is a waitlist for future borrowing.

Emergency Management has strengthened over the life of the Strategy with increased numbers of township plans and increased numbers of groups (currently there are 17).

Interpretation

Emission cuts, renewable adoption, and preparedness programs demonstrate clear achievement.

Best metrics

- Council GHG emissions (tCO₂e) as a headline climate outcome measure.
- EV fleet size and chargers installed are a clear proxy for transition readiness.
- Solar PV installations (Council and community) are a strong renewable energy indicator.
- Participation in resilience-building programs (The Adaptation Game, township plans) are a valid measure of community-level preparedness.



Theme 3: My home

Goal 6: Environmental stewardship has been enhanced

This goal aimed to improve environmental understanding and increase people's ability to respond to the natural world. By encouraging people to experience the natural environment their sense of belonging and responsibility towards place, is strengthened.

Environmental stewardship across the municipality is fostered by:

- Engaging with the community and provide environmentally focused education, support, resources and events.
- Supporting local environmentally focused groups, by promoting and supporting good governance and capacity building.
- Encouraging environmentally sustainable choices for people's homes, properties and businesses.
- Supporting and promoting the development and use of nature-based recreation activities.
- Working with community to share Indigenous land management knowledge.

The best available data and metrics to measure the degree to which environmental stewardship has been enhanced are contained in Table 12.

Metric and Source	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
Gardens for Harvest events Source: Yarra Ranges Council				4	8	6	5	5	6	6
Community Gardens Network participation Source: Yarra Ranges Council									10 active gardens in the network	
Container Deposit Scheme statistics (municipal data and being container collected since Nov 2023) Source: Visy									9,675,629	19,441,656
# Environmental volunteers ¹¹ Source: DEECA					1309	1206	917	2896	1723	
Easter Alliance for Sustainable Living (EASL) Source: Yarra Ranges Council	Yarra Ranges has been one of five member councils through to 2024 and became one of seven on 2025 as membership increased by two Current member councils: Boroondara, Knox, Monash, Manningham, Maroondah, Whitehorse and Yarra Ranges Newsletter subscribers have increased from 106 in 2017/18 to the current total of 760									
	Events = 8 Attendees = 76	Events = 8 Attendees = 76	Events = 5 Attendees = 98	Events = 6 Attendees = 242	Events = 3 Attendees = 267	Events = 5 Attendees = 166	Events = 13 Attendees = 271	Events = 18 Attendees = 444	Events = 21 Attendees = 548	Events = 20 Attendees = 966
Resource Recovery statistics - waste diversion overall ¹² Source: Yarra Ranges Council	29,340	30,105	29,705	29,811	32,680	34,088	32,516	33,154	46,166	46,830
Ribbons of Green # participants Source: Yarra Ranges Council	29	52	47	36	41	64	81	67	66	61
Gardens for Wildlife # participants Source: Yarra Ranges Council	N/A	33	30 (63)	58 (121)	194 (315)	79 (394)	1 (395)	189 (584)	213 (797)	210 (1007) ¹³
ResourceSmart Schools participation Source: Yarra Ranges Council	Program had not commenced						15	23	27	28
Volunteer Hours ¹⁴ Source: DEECA					61,433	29881	32463	33394	55827	-
Volunteer Hours Garden Guides - G4W (actual hours) Source: Yarra Ranges Council		99	90	174	582	237	3	567	639	630
Environmental Volunteer Group Support ¹⁵ Source: Yarra Ranges Council	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

¹¹ Numbers from DEECA's annual surveys - 2025 numbers not available. Data is reliant on self-reporting so not absolutely accurate.

¹² Data is total Waste Diverted from landfill from kerbside (FOGO & recycling) and hard rubbish recycled collections (mattresses, scrap metal and e-waste) and bundled branch collections measured by annual tonnage

¹³ Number in bracket is the cumulative number per year

¹⁴ Numbers from DEECA's annual surveys - 2025 numbers not available. Data is reliant on self-reporting so not absolutely accurate

¹⁵ EVSO provides Guidelines; on-ground support (plants, tools etc); training (first aid, weed ID, wildlife rescue etc); printing; insurance; networking; creating & supporting volunteering opportunities.

Metric and Source	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
Variety of environment events and programs offered Source: Yarra Ranges Council				19	36	30	25	30	32	36
Number of events Source: Yarra Ranges Council				23	42	32	25	39	44	43
Attendance at events Source: Yarra Ranges Council							611	1628	2041	2619
Residential Waste statistics (fortnightly collections) Source: Yarra Ranges Council	29,943	30,400	30,154	29,307	29,775	31,619	31,228	30,507	21,464	19,927
Residential Recycling statistics (fortnightly collections) Source: Yarra Ranges Council	17,413	17,238	17,045	16,781	16,861	16,940	16,483	15,613	14,921	14,182
On Country Walks Source: Yarra Ranges Council	Awaiting data									
Garden Organics and FOGO Statistics (weekly collections) Source: Yarra Ranges Council	9,651	11,383	11,273	11,545	14,401	15,401	14,939	16,004	29,175	31,262
Hard rubbish Collections (waste to landfill component) Source: Yarra Ranges Council	5,852	4,988	5,973	5,512	6,650	6,835	7,553	6,473	6,144	6,653
E-waste (part of hard rubbish collections) Source: Yarra Ranges Council	47	28	45	31	68	42	12	17	24	35
Mattresses (part of hard rubbish collections) Source: Yarra Ranges Council	284	217	115	267	296	338	336	257	227	216
Scrap Metal (part of hard rubbish collections) Source: Yarra Ranges Council	1,487	739	824	864	656	955	408	888	1,016	910
Park and street litter bins Source: Yarra Ranges Council	422	399	400	392	353	332	349	434	475	502
Bundled Branch Collections (twice yearly) Source: Yarra Ranges Council	453	496	400	322	399	412	338	375	264	225

Table 12: Goal 6 Metrics

Analysis

Status: When examined against the available metrics, the evaluation finds Goal 6 mostly achieved.

The metrics presented (25 in total) indicate that environmental stewardship within the Yarra Ranges has been strengthened in several important ways, despite some areas showing fluctuations or emerging challenges. Stewardship, understood as active care for the natural environment through community engagement, resource management, and waste reduction, appears to be both broadening and deepening across multiple programs.

Community participation has grown markedly. For example, the G4W program has grown sharply in participation, from just 33 participants in 2016/17 to a cumulative 1,000 by 2024/25. Similarly, the Ribbons of Green initiative increased its participant base from 29 per year in 2015/16 to 61 in a single year in 2024/25, reflecting consistent support for revegetation and biodiversity programs.

It should be noted that there have been over many years environmentally themed community-led events. Unfortunately, this data is not archived, though available data suggests seven (7) environmentally themed events from May to August 2025. This demonstrates the community is self-organising into environmental events.

The Environmental Volunteer Group Support has remained steady, consistently active over the ten-year span, with volunteer hours peaking above 55,000 in 2019/20. While overall volunteer numbers vary year to year (from under 1,000 to nearly 3,000), the long-term trajectory highlights a resilient volunteer culture.

Further, there has been a clear increase in the number of environment focussed events, an increase in the variety of events and programs offered and participation the last four years increasing from just over 600 in 2021/22 to more than 2,600 in 2024/25.

These figures indicate not only sustained but expanding stewardship, with residents directly investing time and labour into environmental care.

Resource recovery statistics show significant improvement. Overall waste diversion increased from around 29,000 tonnes in 2015/16 to nearly 47,000 tonnes in 2024/25. This reflects enhanced recycling systems, expanded organics collection (FOGO), and growing community uptake. Notably, Garden Organics and FOGO tonnages tripled across the decade, climbing from 9,651 tonnes in 2015/16 to over 31,000 tonnes by 2024/25.

Such expansion illustrates both improved Council infrastructure and a public willingness to separate waste streams responsibly. Conversely, residential recycling tonnages fell from 17,413 in 2015/16 to 14,182 in 2024/25, suggesting either declining participation or lighter-weight packaging. Nonetheless, the surge in organics collection and the uptake of the container deposit scheme (9.6 million 19.6 million in the last two years) indicates a structural shift toward higher-impact diversion.

Networks and alliances grew both in numbers and strength. Specifically, the Eastern Alliance for Sustainable Living (EASL) membership grew with Yarra Ranges continuing as a core member, while the alliance itself expanded from five to seven councils by 2025. EASL events also demonstrate rising reach with annual attendees increasing from 76 in early years to nearly 1,000 by 2024/25, and newsletter subscribers expanding from 106 to 760.

The ResourceSmart Schools program and participation remains a flagship program for Yarra Ranges Council. Engagement points to intergenerational stewardship, with participation climbing from 15 Yarra Ranges schools in 2021/22 to 28 in 2024/25.

These results highlight investment in education, collaboration, and behavioural change that extend stewardship beyond individual programs toward systemic cultural adoption.

Not all indicators point upward. Residential recycling is declining, hard rubbish to landfill remains stubbornly high, and e-waste recovery is inconsistent. Volunteer numbers dipped in some years, and the number of community events fluctuates. These highlight ongoing challenges in sustaining momentum, diversifying participation, and adapting to changes in consumer waste patterns. Moreover, while stewardship breadth has expanded, depth—measured by consistent participation across all indicators—remains uneven.

Interpretation

Overall, environmental stewardship has clearly been enhanced across the Yarra Ranges. Community participation in programs like Gardens for Wildlife and Ribbons of Green shows strong engagement with biodiversity goals. Waste diversion, particularly through organics recovery, demonstrates tangible environmental benefit. Education and alliances have broadened the stewardship base, embedding sustainability into schools and regional networks. Despite challenges in recycling consistency and some volunteer variability, the cumulative evidence reflects a maturing stewardship culture—one that has diversified, expanded, and embedded itself into the fabric of community life.

Best metrics

- Resource recovery (waste diversion tonnes) being outcome-focused, tracking landfill avoidance.
- FOGO/organics tonnes collected as a strong indicator of behaviour change.
- Container Deposit Scheme collections being a clear high-volume success measure.
- Environmental volunteer hours to capture community stewardship capacity.