Mount Alexander
Shire Council

Climate Change Strategy

Acknowledgement of Country

Mount Alexander Shire Council acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Owners of Country. We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and continuing relationship with the land.

We pay our respects to leaders and Elders, past, present and emerging of the Dja Dja Wurrung and the Taungurung peoples as the traditional owners of the lands and waters of Mount Alexander Shire. We also recognise all other Indigenous people of the Shire.

We acknowledge the vital role that Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung peoples and their forbears play as custodians of this region for many centuries, performing age-old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal.

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Mayor's Message

<Text from the Mayor to be inserted>

Our Climate Change Strategy

We are already feeling the impacts of climate change. Our land, our health, and our economy are being harmed. Hotter and more extreme weather, intense heat waves, bushfires, drought, storms and flooding are here to stay unless we act fast[i].

This Strategy describes:

- how Council will respond to climate change in our own operations
- how Council will partner with our community to respond to climate change

In Mount Alexander Shire, we are already taking action but there is more we can do. With this new Strategy, Council commits to using our legislated powers to take action on climate change. Together, we can continue to build our resilience. We can strengthen our connections and climate-readiness across the Shire we all love.

Climate action helps achieve our Community Vision 2021-2031

After extensive community engagement, the community of Mount Alexander Shire produced the following 10-year vision, which represents our aspirations for the next decade:

In 2031, our community is connected to each other, and comes together to build and celebrate an inclusive, creative shire. We are a healthy community that values the natural beauty of the Djaara Country we live on. We know that preserving our natural environment means living sustainably and caring for country. We are protecting our shire from the threat of climate change by working together at the local level. We are a welcoming community where everybody has access to services and supports, and opportunities for housing, education, employment and creative and social pursuits. We're known as a vibrant place which draws upon its creative spirit and shared heritage. We're building a place where everyone can enjoy the beauty, history and friendliness of the shire.

Three core pillars will help achieve the Community Vision. Each pillar:

- Is threatened by climate change

- Presents opportunities for our whole community to respond to climate change

Pillar 1 - A healthy, connected and inclusive community

Threats	Opportunities
Climate change affects our health and wellbeing through: - Increased intensity and frequency of extreme weather, including heatwaves, floods and bushfires - Reduced air quality and changes in the spread of infectious diseases	Communities with strong social and physical connections are more resilient. When we know each other, we can work together and look after each other. Continuing to build and connect our community will help keep us all safe and well in a changing climate. We can also build climate-resilient physical

● Risks to food availability and reduced water quality ● Poor mental health, like stress and anxiety, including ecological and climate anxiety Climate change is also an equity issue. Some people in our community may be more affected than others[ii], including: ● Children, women, older people, people with disabilities and First Nations people ● Those experiencing homelessness or who have lower incomes ● Those who do not speak English or know how to navigate our social support systems	infrastructure to help us stay connected. For example, footpaths that are walkable and usable by all can be designed to withstand floods and extreme heat. We can involve climate-sensitive groups to a greater degree in the planning and implementing of our responses Our vibrant arts community can help illustrate and unite us behind our vision for the future.

Pillar 2 - An environment for people and nature

Threats	Opportunities
Climate change is affecting the natural environment that we love through: ● Tree dieback ● Changes to water flows ● Reduced water quality ● Loss of fire-sensitive vegetation ● Loss of drought-sensitive vegetation ● Less successful breeding in native species ● Loss of vulnerable aquatic species ● Increased spread of plant diseases ● Changes to the timing of life-cycle events ● Changes to species distribution and numbers ● Increased spread of invasive species ● Loss of culturally significant places	We can use nature-based solutions to climate change problems. Nature-based solutions harness the power and resilience of nature to solve challenges. Examples include: ● Planting trees to help cool our homes and townships ● DJAARA's cultural burning practices that heal Country and balance fire in our landscapes ● Planting fire retardant trees to help protect our places from bushfires ● Restore water channels and expand green surfaces to reduce flood risk ● Protect and restore trees and habitat in a way that helps keep our waterways healthy

Pillar 3 - A resilient and growing local economy

Threats	Opportunities
Climate change affects our economy through: ● Changing weather patterns impact farm productivity ● Extreme weather damaging property and infrastructure ● Increasing insurance costs ● Disruption to our tourism and creative industries ● Interrupted supply chains lead to a shortage of goods	Growing our local business and industry helps protect us from supply chain interruptions. We can increase our popularity as a tourism destination by: ● Enhancing our natural environment ● Creating cooler, greener townships ● Protecting our agricultural land ● Promoting renewable energy and other zero-net carbon initiatives in the shire

Every action we take to tackle climate change brings us a step closer to reaching the Community Vision.

Our community shares Council's concerns and ambitions to act on climate change.

Council consulted our community for the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025. This led to the theme 'Tackling climate change and its impact on health' being the top priority.

In a 2022 community survey, respondents reported high levels of concern about:

● Longer fire seasons
● Hotter temperatures
● Extreme weather events
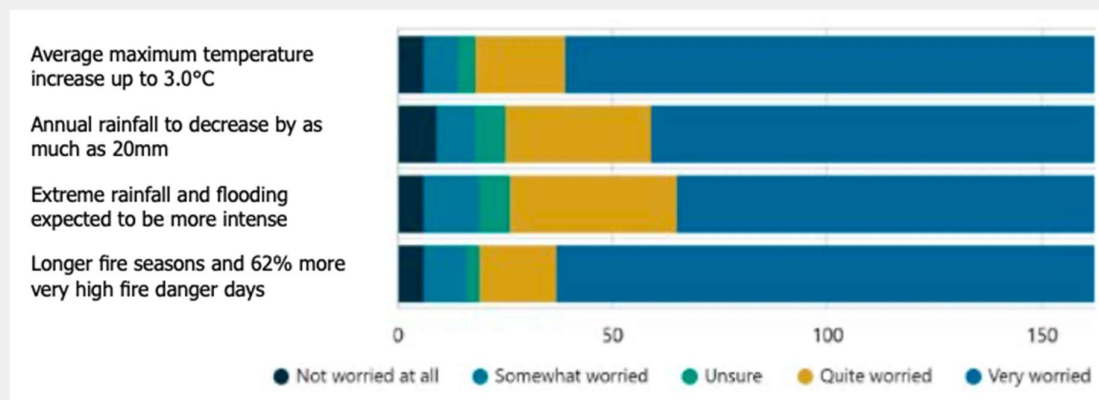
The graph above shows an excerpt from the 2022 Climate Change Strategy community survey results from Council's Shape Platform

Council's role in climate action

Mount Alexander Shire Council has been taking action long before we were legally required. We take action because it is critical for the health of our community, our land, and our economy.

There are many reasons why climate change is a critical factor for Council to consider. These include:
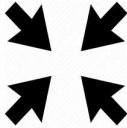
- Rising insurance premiums and liability issues
- Council's financial sustainability; small investments today will avoid larger costs in the future
- Supporting economic, social and environmental sustainability across our Shire
- The planning for and mitigation of climate change risks
- Strong community expectation that local governments are preparing for climate change
- The co-benefits of adaptation responses. These include improved health and wellbeing, lower energy bills, and lower maintenance costs
- Prioritising best outcomes for our community, including future generations.

Through this Strategy, Council is looking to maximise our impact. As such, we must recognise:

- Where we have the powers, connections and resources to deliver strong, meaningful outcomes
- Where other levels of government or organisations are better placed to effect real change
- Where we can best partner with community and other organisations to deliver impact

We also recognise responding to climate change is an ongoing process, not a set of one-off actions or projects. Every day, our organisation makes decisions that have consequences for the short and the long term. Today's climate impacts are already more frequent and intense than in previous decades. Every decision or project must seek to increase our well-being today and in the future.

Council can't do it all. However, we commit to using our connections, and resources to their full effect.

To maximise our impact Council will			
Inwards	**Outwards**	**Sideways**	**Upwards**
Look inwards to ensure that over time, all our own operations and decisions drive an effective climate response	Work in partnership with and draw on the expertise of our community, including Traditional Owners and Custodians	Collaborate with and learn from other Councils (e.g. Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance)	Advocate to state and federal governments where we don't have the legislated powers to effect change

Adapted from https://www.caceonline.org/

Federal Government's role in climate action

The Federal Government has the strongest powers and largest resources to tackle climate change and ensure Australia achieves zero-net emissions.

In mid-2022 the Australian Government introduced a new emissions reduction target. Australia is now committed to reducing emissions by 43 per cent by 2030, and zero-net emissions by 2050. They have also developed a National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy 2021-2025.

Victorian Government's role in climate action

The Victorian Government has significant powers and resources to respond to climate change.

Recognising the importance of climate action, the Victorian Government legislated action through the Victorian Climate Change Act. Since then, the State Government has:

- Developed the Building Victoria's Climate Resilience Plan, and 7 supporting Action Plans
- Legislated a target of zero-net emissions by 2050. In late 2022, they committed to bring this target forward to achieve zero-net emissions by 2045
- Legislated a target of 50 per cent of Victoria's electricity coming from renewable sources by 2030. In late 2022, they committed to increasing these targets to 65 per cent by 2030, and 95 per cent by 2035
- Achieved their goal of 25 per cent renewable energy generation by 2020. In 2020, Victoria generated more than 26 per cent of its energy from renewable sources
- Developed a Gas Substitution Roadmap to pave the way for zero-net emissions
- Led the development of the regional ADAPT Loddon Mallee plan

All levels of government will need to work together to:

- Achieve zero-net emissions sooner
- Invest heavily in climate change adaptation
- Make climate change a priority for all elements of government business, including legislation, regulation, budgets, programs and services

Goals

The strategy is guided by six overarching goals that will help achieve the Community Vision and respond to climate change. Each goal has three action areas that more clearly identify Council's role in achieving the goal. Responding to the enormous challenge of climate change requires long term operational and societal change, which in turn requires long term thinking. As such, these goals do not have timeframes, but inform the development of annual action plans.

Goal 1: Climate action is in everything we do	Action area 1: Right across Council, our initiatives, projects, and services have climate outcomes
Key progress to date: 1. Climate change included in all Councillor briefings 2. Whole of organisation climate risk assessment undertaken 3. Established the Climate Change Leadership group, comprising Managers and Coordinators from across Council	The most effective and cost-efficient way Council can act on climate change is to embed it into the way it works. Council has come a long way in embedding consideration of climate change across its operations and service delivery. We commit to continually improving how we consider, integrate and act on climate change across all our work.
	Action area 2: We consistently integrate climate messages into communications arising from all departments Council plays an important role in normalising climate change action. We do this by: ● Communicating how we are taking climate action in our own operations ● Integrating climate messages into communications on other topics ● Keeping our community informed about how they can take action We commit to regular communication on climate change to inspire others, share success and make it easier to work together.
	Action area 3: We seek innovative ways to increase resourcing for climate action While some climate actions lead to financial savings (eg. installing solar on Council buildings), many climate actions require resourcing. Funding the necessary scale of climate action requires innovative thinking, a long-term view, and making hard decisions. Council will investigate creative ways to resource climate action across the organisation every year. By embedding climate action into the way we work, we will also ensure existing budgets make a positive contribution.

Goal 2: We transition in a just and equitable way to a zero emissions shire Key progress to date: 1. Council's Roadmap To Carbon Neutrality sets out how Council will achieve its target of zero-net emissions by 2025 2. Council uses 100% renewable electricity for its own operations through the VECO project 3. Council is working in partnership to support the community's target of zero-net emissions by 2030 Council's Active Transport programs complement Action Area 3 of this goal.	**Action area 1: Council operations are efficient, and powered by renewable energy** The way we use and generate energy at Council can demonstrate best practice. Council's electricity is already 100% renewable thanks to the cross-council Victorian Energy Collaboration project. We are committed to zero-net operational emissions by 2025. We are electrifying facilities (removing gas), and continuing to improve energy efficiency. We will power our fleet with renewable energy (e.g. electric or alternative fuel sources such as hydrogen). We also commit to understanding and where possible reducing emissions that are a consequence of our activities but not directly generated by us. For example, emissions that come from when we buy, use and dispose of products or services.
	Action area 2: Council partners on and supports programs to achieve a just transition to zero-net emissions for its residents and businesses Over the next decade Victoria will undergo a rapid transition to zero-net emissions. This transition is inevitable and will happen across all sectors. Council's role is best focused on working in partnership with other organisations and our community with the intent of enabling this transition to be fair and accessible for all. We also want to prioritise emissions reductions actions that have broader community benefits. Our community has a long history of climate action and there are many community initiatives underway to support emissions reductions. Council will partner on community emissions projects and programs in an equitable way.
	Action area 3: Council delivers infrastructure and advocacy that supports a well-connected low carbon transport system The Victorian Government manages the broader road and public transport networks. Council maintains local roads and supports community transport initiatives. Council will focus its resources to: ● Deliver local transport infrastructure that encourages healthy activity ● Advocate to the State Government for low-carbon, accessible and affordable transport infrastructure

	● Partner with businesses and organisations who support low-carbon transport. For example, electric vehicle charging providers, electric vehicle community bulk-buy initiatives, and community transport providers

	Action area 1: Council delivers Water Sensitive Urban Design, and partnerships for a water sensitive shire
Goal 3: Our natural environment and green spaces are healthy, resilient and increasing Key progress to date: 1. Council is addressing drought through exploring alternative water supplies for our Recreation Reserves and the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens 2. Council delivers an Annual Street Tree Planting Program 3. Council is implementing the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens Climate Change Study and Tree Succession Plan Our Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025 complements Action Area 2 of this goal.	Council has a key role in protecting and managing our precious water resources. Our shire faces both flood and drought risks. Water Sensitive Urban Design reduces stormwater runoff, and increases efficient water use. Examples include using rainwater, treated wastewater, and stormwater to improve urban environments. Council will improve Water Sensitive Urban Design outcomes on its own land and partner for a more water sensitive shire.
	Action area 2: Council delivers and partners to increase canopy cover, ecosystem resilience and landscape connectivity Council manages a range of valued public natural assets. These include urban street trees, roadside vegetation, creeks, playgrounds, small reserves, and botanical gardens. These assets reduce urban heat and cool our towns, making our shire more liveable. Council will work to improve the resilience and extent of its own natural assets. Mount Alexander is home to a strong, knowledgeable network of community groups and organisations that care for country. We will partner to improve the natural environment across all land tenures. We will promote opportunities for everyone in the Shire to help green our landscape and support our precious ecosystem.
	Action area 3: Council seeks opportunities for positive environmental outcomes on private land Much of the environmental assets on private land are regulated by State and Federal legislation. However, Council can still play a role through regulating planning controls across our Shire. Working together, our Shire can improve the health of its natural environment for the benefit of all.

Goal 4: Our infrastructure is robust in the face of current and future climate change impacts Key progress to date: 1. Council participated in stage 1 of the Elevating Environmentally Sustainable Development Targets Planning Policy Amendment project 2. The Mount Alexander Planning Scheme includes policy to support Environmentally Sustainable Development 3. Council advocated for an increase in energy efficiency standards for new homes through the National Construction Code	**Action area 1: Council-owned buildings, assets and infrastructure are resilient and built for future climate** Climate change impacts pose risks to Council facilities, assets and infrastructure. This can include buildings, roads, street furniture, footpaths etc. They can increase maintenance costs and reduce asset lifespans. Failing infrastructure can reduce Council's ability to deliver services. Building and retrofitting climate-resilient assets can cost more upfront. Over their lifetime they can deliver savings through lower maintenance and longer lifespans. Council will seek to balance these costs. Over time we will strengthen our assets' ability to withstand climate change impacts.
	Action area 2: Council uses planning controls to reduce exposure to climate risks The strongest planning outcomes are set by the Victorian Planning System. These are managed by the State and Federal governments. Council has limited planning powers to guide climate outcomes on private land, and building outcomes are often driven by the Australian Building Code. We will use planning controls to reduce exposure to the climate risks our shire faces for community and private buildings, and open spaces.
	Action area 3: Council advocates and educates for climate-resilient buildings and development As Council's direct planning powers are limited, it is essential that Council advocates to other levels of government for better climate change planning outcomes. We will continue to work in partnership with local organisations and other councils to advocate for stronger planning laws and regulations. We will also promote opportunities to improve climate resilience in existing and new buildings and infrastructure.

Goal 5: Our community is connected and has the capacity to adapt to climate change Key progress to date: 1. Developed a local vulnerable persons register and emergency management processes to support residents experiencing vulnerability 2. Continue to partner on the Healthy Mount Alexander working group 3. Developed the Mount Alexander Municipal Emergency Management Plan and Municipal Heatwave Plan 4. Continue to explore climate change action and solutions with young people via Council's Youth Advisory Group The Mount Alexander Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025 complements this goal.	**Action area 1: Council works with our community to strengthen social cohesion and connection** Social cohesion plays a key role in resilience to climate change impacts. In a connected community with a strong sense of belonging people are better able to care for each other. Together we can prepare for and recover from shocks and stressors. Strengthening social cohesion also helps reduce inequity and inequality. In our Shire, we have strong community foundations and a culture of caring. We have local groups and organisations who build and nurture social networks. Council will continue to offer services and partner to support and build social cohesion and connection.
	Action area 2: Within our programs and services Council prioritises support to members of the community most at risk of experiencing vulnerability to climate change impacts Climate change impacts our community in different ways. Some members of our community will be more prone to vulnerability than others. This may be through exposure to climate hazards (like heatwaves) or in the ability to adapt and respond (e.g. install solar and turn on the air conditioner). Council will work with the community to understand who is at risk of experiencing vulnerability to climate change and within our programs and services prioritise supporting those who need it most.
	Action area 3: Council partners to reduce climate risks, and prepare for and respond to extreme weather events Council plays a partnering, rather than leading, role in emergency management. Our region will face more intense, complex emergency events due to climate change. Many of these events will overlap, reducing recovery time. In times of crisis, our community comes together. Individuals, community organisations, and governments collaborate to deliver services to those in need. Council will improve how it collaborates and works together to reduce climate risks.

Goal 6: Our shire is zero waste and has a resilient, circular economy Key progress to date: 1. Provision of worm farms to local schools 2. Discounted compost bin program for residents 3. Provision of specialised recycling services for items such as florescent tubes, motor oil and e-waste These goals are noted for incorporation into Council waste and economic development programs.	**Action area 1: Council operations are transitioning to zero waste** Council has committed to achieving zero-net emissions for waste in its own operations by 2025. Council will lead by example in its own operations. We will seek to integrate circular economy principles into the way it works.
	Action area 2: Council services and infrastructure support our community to transition to zero waste We all generate waste so getting to zero waste is a shared responsibility and challenge. Recognising this, our community has led the way on a number of waste reduction initiatives. Federal and State governments contribute through legislation, programs, and waste system coordination. Council contributes through local waste and recycling infrastructure and services. Council will partner and advocate so that our waste services help us all move towards zero waste.
	Action area 3: Council economic development services support the transition to a circular economy All levels of government have a role to play in the shift towards a circular economy. In a circular economy, waste is designed out and products and materials stay in use for as long as possible. In our shire, we will not only aim for a circular economy but also a more localised economy. The shire already has inspirational businesses that take part in the circular economy and allow us to shop locally. Council will continue partnerships and initiatives to speed the transition.

How Council will deliver this Strategy

We are committed to walking alongside our First Nations peoples in our response to climate change. We recognise the importance of climate action to Traditional Owners and will work to understand opportunities for collaboration and knowledge sharing.

The cross-cutting nature of climate change will impact all parts of Council operations. As such, every Council team will play a role in delivering this Strategy (see Principle 2 below). All new and updated Council strategies and plans will support the goals in this document.

To keep the Strategy on track Council will:

- Develop and deliver an annual Climate Change Action Plan
- Use the monitoring and evaluation framework to track progress and shape future work (see following section)
- Conduct internal reviews of the Strategy at minimum every 4 years, in line with development of Council Plans

Principles for delivery

The Council Plan 2021-25 sets three Principles for service delivery. These principles guided the development of this Strategy. They will also guide the implementation of this Strategy and associated Action Plans.

Principle 1 - We are engaging genuinely with the community

Council will:

- Share achievements and challenges related to this Strategy
- Use all Council's communications channels to keep our community informed
- Consult with our community for the Strategy mid-term review
- Consult with local stakeholders to develop annual Climate Change Action Plans

Principle 2 - We are always improving

In the context of climate change, improving means embedding climate action into the way Council works. Climate change is or will affect all areas of Council's operations and services. Thus all areas must be part of the solution.

We will strengthen our work to embed climate action into Council culture and systems. Ultimately, our aim is for every decision, initiative, project, and service to contribute to our climate response. This is the most cost-effective, high-impact way for Council to address climate change. It is also an approach supported by our community.

Principle 3 - We are delivering together

Our community has a long history of delivering innovative climate change projects. Council would like to acknowledge the important work of the many local groups and organisations that are:

- Building our community resilience, connection and care
- Responding to climate change
- Caring for country and culture

We know our community is knowledgeable and capable. We know it is essential for all local resources to be used for maximum effect. As such, we must all play our best role. Council does not need to do and lead everything.

To respond to climate change and fulfil our Community Vision, Council will work with our community and organisations, here and across the region. We will:

- Lead when it is appropriate
- Partner to maximise impact
- Provide support to help others do their best work
- Avoid duplication by encouraging others to lead where they are best placed
- Listen to, support, and work with Traditional Owners and Custodians
- Draw on local expertise and experience
- Seek input from those who will be impacted most by climate change, including our young people
- Openly share information to help us all work better together

Measuring and sharing progress

This monitoring and evaluation approach aims to:

- Keep our community informed
- Balance resources deployed on reporting with the resources deployed to undertake action

Council will report on the progress of this Strategy each year through a report to Council and via the Council website.

Goals	Monitoring and evaluation questions	How we will answer the monitoring and evaluation questions
1. Climate action is in everything we do	What action has been undertaken to embed climate change action across Council operations?	Annual review workshop with Climate Leadership Group and narrative evaluation of progress. For the internal review of the Strategy, conduct an audit of Council documents and decisions to understand how climate change considerations are being integrated (e.g. Council reports; new strategies, action plans and policies; major projects documentation; media releases, human resource documentation).
	Are staff embedding climate change action in their work?	Data provided via Council's Quarterly Reporting Framework.
2. We transition in a just and equitable way	What has Council achieved in terms of reducing its own carbon emissions?	Data extracted from Roadmap to Carbon Neutrality Updates. Monitor financial reporting for investment in fossil fuel divested

to a zero emissions Shire		funds included in Council's quarterly financial reporting.
	How has Council supported our community to transition to zero-net emissions?	Narrative evaluation of progress, including key programs and outcomes delivered. Seek feedback from key community project delivery partners. Where relevant, include the number of participants for programs and initiatives. Record any resources Council provides local groups and organisations for zero emissions initiatives. Data from evaluation reports of relevant externally/grant-funded programs.
3. Our natural environment and green spaces are healthy, resilient and increasing	What action has been undertaken to enhance the natural environment on Council owned land?	List key programs and advocacy, and outcomes delivered.
	Has the number of trees on Council owned land increased?	Data from Council's tree planting, removal and maintenance programs (no. of trees planted minus no. of trees removed/no longer viable)
	How has Council supported or encouraged private land owners to enhance the natural environment?	Narrative evaluation of progress, including key programs and outcomes delivered. Where relevant, include the number of participants for programs and initiatives. Record any resources Council provides local groups and organisations for revegetation and greening initiatives. Data from evaluation reports of relevant externally/grant-funded programs.
4. Our built form is robust in the face of	What action has been undertaken to ensure Council's buildings and infrastructure are robust in the face of climate	List relevant upgrades delivered, and link to climate impacts.

current and future climate change impacts	change impacts?	
	How has Council supported or encouraged our community to protect their homes and businesses from climate change impacts?	Narrative evaluation of progress, including key programs and outcomes delivered. Where relevant, include the number of participants for programs and initiatives.
	How has Council advocated for change?	Details of advocacy submissions, partnerships and meetings.
5. Our community is connected and has the capacity to adapt to climate change	How has Council supported our community to ensure they are protected from the worst impacts of climate change?	Narrative evaluation of progress, including key programs and outcomes delivered. Where relevant, include the number of participants for programs and initiatives. Record any resources Council provides local groups and organisations for climate change resilience and adaptation initiatives. Report on outcomes of partnerships with organisations and community groups providing community connection and increasing capacity to adapt. Where available, source data on social cohesion and the ability of our community to adapt to climate change.
6. Our shire is zero waste and has a resilient, circular economy	Monitoring and reporting under this goal will be captured through other program areas of Council.	

References

Our community generously shared ideas and local priorities for this Strategy through:

- Surveys
- Workshops
- Interviews
- Pop-up stalls
- Emails
- A Community Reference Group

Previous engagement data and community documents were also reviewed:

- 2019 Climate Emergency Declaration First Nations Youth Leadership Program
- Dkelkunya Dja - Dja Dja Wurrung Country Plan 2014-34
- Nalderun website
- 2019 Climate Emergency Declaration Forum
- Submissions to the development of the Wararack Initiatives
- Community Vision engagement data and report
- Early Years Plan community engagement data
- Middle Years Plan community survey data

This approach allowed a broad spectrum of views to feed into the Strategy.

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[i] CSIRO 2019: Climate Futures tool
https://www.climatechangeinaustralia.gov.au/en/projections-tools/climate-futures-tool/projections
[ii] World Health Organisation 2021: Climate change and health
https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health