



Snapshot

Community conversations: building engagement to mainstream climate adaptation in Mornington Peninsula Shire Council

Summary

The Mornington Peninsula Shire Council recognises that effective adaptation to climate change requires strong community engagement. Through a series of community 'conversations' the Council shared information and built a platform for community concerns to be identified and heard. The community conversations were valuable in that they:

- increased shared awareness of risks and concerns
- built community trust and confidence, and provided the Council with confidence to undertake adaptation actions
- enabled actions to identify and target barriers to action and agreed risks
- facilitated ongoing community interest and engagement

Ten years on from its first large-scale community engagement, the Council has several climate change adaptation programs underway.

The Mornington Peninsula Shire Council is situated on a promontory that separates Port Philip and Western Port Bays. It is vulnerable to coastal hazards and other extreme weather events including drought, bushfires and heatwaves.

The Council has been preparing for the potential impacts of climate change over the past decade, with community engagement central to its approach. In 2006 Council began its extensive community engagement process with a series of community workshops or forums ('Your Community Your Future'), which were followed in 2008 with climate change 'conversations'. Twelve community forums were held across the Peninsula and these focused on informing residents about a scientific integrated assessment of climate change impacts for the region. Over 3000 participants discussed their concerns and identified the barriers to changing their behaviour. The engagement process worked well because it 'hooked' the community at a critical time when interest and concern about climate change risks were high. Also, the engagement process was responsive and designed to address topics and issues nominated by the audience.

Keywords

Community engagement,
mainstreaming climate adaptation,
community conversations

Following the community conversations, the Council commenced behaviour change programs that were based on the barriers identified by residents at the meetings and also on action to manage key climate change risks. There was also community support for identified climate change response strategies (e.g. to manage floods and coastal hazards). These strategies fed into Mornington Peninsula Shire's Strategic Plan and subsequently flowed into business unit plans and budgets in an 'embedded' approach.

At the time of writing, in early 2016, a number of significant programs are underway across the Council. These include the completion of inland and coastal flood mapping across the entire Peninsula to support an Integrated Drainage Strategy, adoption of a policy of carbon neutrality by 2020 and investigations of initiatives such as a community-based solar farming.

One of the challenges of the embedded approach is keeping track of adaptation actions across Council. In response, the Council, through its Climate Change Advisory Committee, is currently developing an Action Plan to capture adaptation planning priorities for the next three years.

Since the initial large-scale community engagement, the Council's ongoing community interactions tend to be focused around specific risks or opportunities. For example, engagement has occurred at the township level around the outcomes of the inland and coastal flood mapping (Figure 1). Similarly behaviour change programs, such as the ones held at the Eco Living centre, have focused on providing practical information about mitigation and adaptation opportunities associated with sustainable living (Figure 2).

It is clear that the initial community engagement has given the Council the confidence to undertake adaptation actions. The community appear comfortable with the Council's position on climate change and more likely to get further involved in activities that affect them directly.

While this initial investment has been significantly helpful in building community trust and confidence in the Council, it is recognised that a commitment to continuous engagement and transparency around climate change will be necessary into the future.



Figure 2: Children undertaking education activities at the Eco Living Centre. Photo: © Liz Hubbert.



Figure 1: Community members attending an information session on the outcomes of the flood mapping in Rosebud. Photo: © Gabrielle McCorkell.

Further reading

The Mornington Peninsula Shire Council's website:
<http://www.mornpen.vic.gov.au/Your-Property/Environment/Climate-Change/What-are-we-doing-to-tackle-climate-change> (accessed 31 January 2017).

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