



Blacktown City Council

Local Community Climate Summit Snapshot

Abstract

In November 2008, 20 local residents (over 18 years & selected to represent the Blacktown LGA demographic) attended a 1½ day Forum hosted by Blacktown City Council and supported by the Nature Conservation Council of NSW through an Environmental Trust grant. Through a structured deliberative democracy process, the panel of residents developed a series of recommendations for local, state and federal government in response to the question “How can we work together to respond to climate change?”



Recruitment Methods for a Representative Sample

A direct mail-out was sent to 3000 randomly selected residents from the electoral roll. This number was chosen as it represents 1% of Blacktown’s population. An equal number of letters were sent to each of the 5 wards in Blacktown in an attempt to attain an even geographical spread. As a creative approach to inspiring involvement, a fair-trade tea bag was included in the envelope to encourage the reader to ‘sit down and have a cup of tea while you consider this request’. The length of time required to commit to the process was reduced to 1 evening session and 1 full Saturday to increase the chances of community members being able to attend. A prize of an ‘eco-weekend away’ was also advertised (to be drawn at the Forum) to further interest invitees and encourage commitment.

From these activities, 29 expressions of interest were returned to Council. Fortunately, those community members who responded were from relatively diverse backgrounds, in terms of age, gender, ethnicity and education (Table 1). All 29 respondents were invited to take part in the deliberations in an attempt to guarantee a minimum of 20 participants at the workshops.

Unfortunately no responses were received from residents in the ‘under 25 years’ category and thus the views of young people were not represented in the deliberations. This is something Council has considered in the application of the Forum’s findings, and in undertaking additional community consultation.

Participants represented a mixture of part time, full time and retired workers from a range of backgrounds and industries.

Characteristic	% Residents	Preferred 20	Profile 20
Gender	Total		
Male	49.6%	10	7
Female	50.4%	10	13
Total	100%	20	20
Region of Birth	Total		
Oceania	63.6%	16	8
Asia	10.4%	2	6
Africa/Middle East	2.4%	1	1
Europe	2.9%	1	4
Total	79.3%	20	19*
Age	>15		
15-24 years	19.4%	4	0
25-54 years	57.6%	12	10
55-64 years	12.2%	2	5
65 + years	10.8%	2	5
Total	100%	20	20

Table 1: Blacktown Participant Representation based on 2006 ABS Census of Population and Housing.

* One participant did not disclose their region of birth





The Deliberative Process: Workshop Design & Output

The Blacktown Local Forum embraced the deliberative process by allowing significant time for participants to debate, enquire, reflect and take on new knowledge. The 1½ day forum agenda is as shown below. Across the two sessions, a variety of methods including World Café and Dot.mocracy were utilised to distil key recommendations for Council. The following 6 recommendations were voted to be the highest priorities:

1. Promote greater use of public transport. Improve efficiency and educate that the service exists
2. Uniform laws across local and state government - policy, planning, implementation and monitoring
3. Council to provide incentives and rewards for industry and community to engage in the 3 R's
4. Natural resources to be better cared for so our river systems, habitat, wildlife and vegetation reduce losses. Increase funding for environment/natural resources management.
5. Collect storm water and recycle for irrigation and other consistent uses.
6. Increase rebates for residential premises.

Time	Thursday 13th November, 2008
18.00 - 18.25	Arrival
18.25 - 18.35	Welcome to Country, Introduction
18.35 - 18.55	Icebreaker activity
18.55 - 19.00	What this session is and isn't about
19.00 - 19.15	Guidelines for participation
19.15 - 19.20	Knowledge in room (lines activity)
19.20 - 19.30	Break
19.30 - 20.30	Introduction to Climate Change
20.30 - 20.45	Overview of Council programs
20.45 - 21.00	Overview of Saturday session

Time	Saturday 15th November, 2008
10.00 - 10.15	Arrival
10.15 - 10.30	Re-cap of Thursday evening
10.30 - 11.00	Health impacts of climate change
11.00 - 11.30	Group discussion
11.30 - 11.40	Diverse perspectives from film
11.40 - 11.50	Overview of responsibility across levels of government
11.50 - 12.00	Personal reflection time
12.00 - 13.00	Group deliberation session 1 - mind-mapping what we can do (Personal/family, Community/local, State, National/global)
13.00 - 14.45	Lunch
14.45 - 15.05	Report back to group
15.05 - 15.30	Group deliberation session 2 - World Café for 'what are the priority actions in Blacktown and NSW?'
15.30 - 15.45	Afternoon tea
15.45 - 16.05	Dot.mocracy for recommendations
16.05 - 16.20	Summary of recommendations
16.20 - 16.45	Way forward from here
16.45 - 16.55	Evaluation
16.55 - 17.00	Draw prize
17.00	Finish

Communicating Outcomes

While the outcomes and recommendations of the Local Forum are yet to be presented to Council, plans are in place to present the findings to Council when the 2009-2010 draft Climate Action Plan is in development. The recommendations will form part of the supporting information underpinning & informing the plan.

The Climate Action Plan will outline the way forward for Blacktown City Council to achieve its goal of becoming carbon neutral and supporting the community to take action on climate change. It is expected that a draft of the plan will be available in early 2010, following further community consultation.

A Community Engagement Strategy for all of Council is also currently being developed and the techniques learnt and developed through the Local Forum project may be utilised and included in the range of tools for community engagement to be employed by Council on an ongoing basis.

From a local community and participant perspective, there were significant positive outcomes as a result of this process. Some of the feedback received on the process included:

“Being a part of this process has given me a greater understanding of the measures being undertaken at a local and state level as well as the viewpoints of a cross-section from my community.”

“I now have a better knowledge and awareness of what contribution we can make to the climate change.”



“Being a part of the Local Forum was great as it gave me positive feedback from other participants. It showed me that we are all striving towards a common goal and trying to overcome obstacles that will lead to change within our community.”

- Blacktown Local

Forum participant



Follow up and Continued Engagement

All Local Forum participants were sent a thank you letter, details of upcoming Council Sustainability workshops and Council's Environmental Services contact details following their participation.

Several of the participants also went on to be a part of the NSW Community Climate Summit in February of 2009 which sought to give strong recommendations to the NSW Government, representative of the NSW community.

Since the Local Forum, some participants have also been in contact with Council seeking further clarification on Council's strategic planning process with regards to energy efficient design principles.

Additional community consultation will also be conducted to inform the development of the Blacktown Climate Action Plan. This process will aim to engage with under-represented sectors of the community such as young people, who were not involved in the 2008 Local Forum.

Council Reflections

While this project proved challenging from a logistics point of view, through significant planning and commitment by Council staff meaningful engagement with the local community was achieved.

Blacktown City Council identified this process as highly worthwhile in terms of the level of community engagement able to be achieved, utilising a method that will certainly be considered in future.

Find Out More

For more information on this project or to learn more about the NSW Community Climate Summit held in February 2009, please visit www.nccnsw.org.au/nswclimatesummit or contact the Nature Conservation Council of NSW on +612 9279 2466.

Challenges and Opportunities

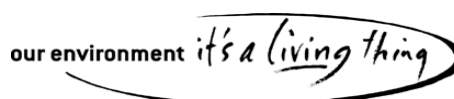
Blacktown City Council faced a number of challenges as part of this project. These included the greater than anticipated cost and time investment associated with project implementation, and the difficulty experienced in securing expert speakers for the event.

These challenges however, were overcome due to the additional support and resources provided by Council to ensure the project was a success.

***"This process has shown me
what we can do to
help with climate change -
we have the power to
make recommendations
as a group and be
involved in the response
to climate change
as an individual."***

- Blacktown Local Forum participant

This project is an initiative of the Nature Conservation Council of NSW and is assisted by the New South Wales Government through its Environmental Trust



Local Council partners: Coffs Harbour, Bellingen, Armidale, Uralla, Guyra, Lake Macquarie, Wyong, Gosford, Pittwater, Warringah, Blacktown, Holroyd, Penrith and Tumut