



Gosford City, Lake Macquarie City & Wyong Shire Councils

Local Community Climate Summit Snapshot

Abstract

In October & November 2008, 28 local residents (18+ & selected to represent the Central Coast demographic) attended one of two, 2½ day forums hosted by Gosford City, Lake Macquarie City & Wyong Shire Councils, funded by the Nature Conservation Council through the Environmental Trust.

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

Invitations to attend workshops in the Gosford, Lake Macquarie and Wyong local government areas (LGA's) were sent to 2,000 randomly selected residential addresses in each of the three LGA's. Some additional invitations were sent to community group contacts and disseminated via customer service sections within council and through the local media (radio and print). From the expressions of interest to these invitations, two local forum groups were formed. One workshop, with 12 participants, was held in Swansea, the other with 16 participants, in Erina. Participants were selected based on formulated community profiles developed by Council and utilised in-house for planning purposes.

The demographic characteristics used to select the participants were gender and age. It was felt that no other demographic characteristic was relevant for this region.

As can be seen in Table 1, recruitment for the Swansea forum largely matched the preferred profile in both gender and age with only a slight over-representation in the '50-64' age bracket. Similarly, Erina participants were evenly split male and female and represented a broad spectrum of ages. This allowed for the output of the deliberations to be considered as representative of the local community.

Characteristic	Residents %	Preferred 12	Profile 12
Gender	Total		
Male	50%	6	8
Female	50%	6	4
Total	100%	12	12
Age	>18		
18-34 years	25%	3	2
35-49 years	25%	3	2
50-64 years	25%	3	5
65 + years	25%	3	3
Total	100%	12	12

Table 1: Swansea Participant Representation based on Council's formulated community profiles

Participants across the two forums included young mums, full time workers and retirees, with varying professional backgrounds including energy, engineering, history, education and science.



The Deliberative Process: Workshop Design & Recommendations

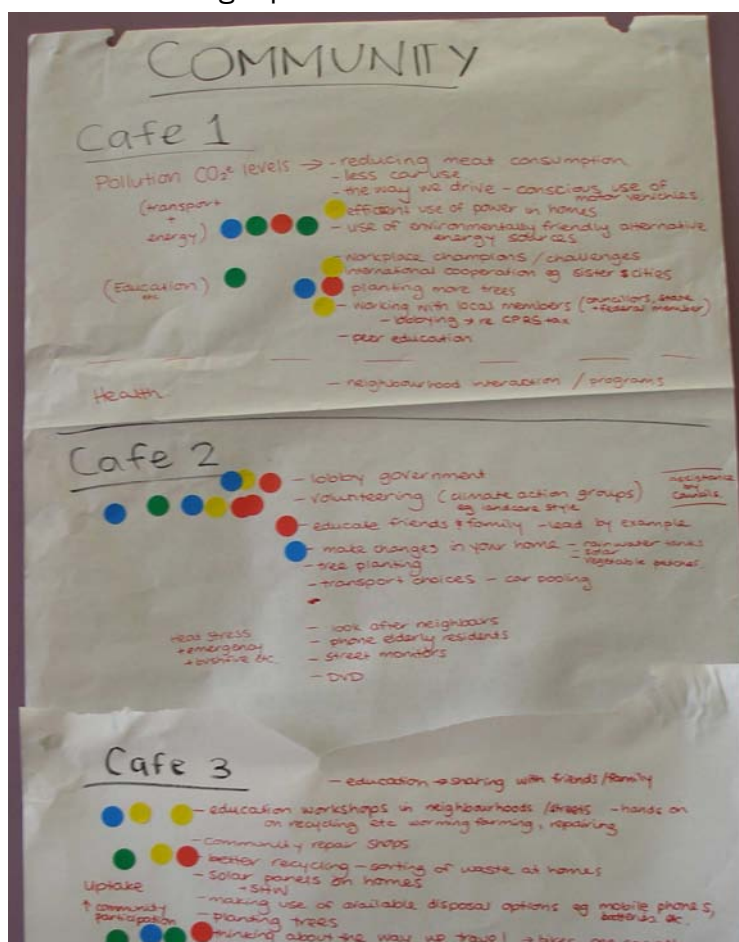
At the commencement of the forum, members were given the charge, or question, to deliberate: **“How can we work together to respond to climate change?”** After hearing a range of presentations, participants identified and prioritised the issues, themes and actions and provided recommendations, to their local community, local council, State and Federal Government on priority actions.

Over the two days participants were given the opportunity to deliberate carefully over the issues, themes and actions, before reaching consensus on priority actions to address the charge. Themes covered were

governance, energy, transport, biodiversity, health, agriculture, energy, water, biodiversity, sea level rise, waste, weather and climate, economy, education and community engagement. Activities included brainstorming, small group work, Dot.mocracy and World Café sessions. Both Forums followed the agenda shown.

The recommendations generated from the two workshops attracted a strong interest within the local media. Both before and after the Forum, Lake Macquarie City Council and Wyong Shire Council generated media releases on the intentions and outcomes of the local meetings. At the conclusion of both workshops, a photo opportunity was arranged showing the handover of the final report to senior Council staff and the Mayor by workshop participants. Stories were published in the Newcastle Star and Central Coast Express Advocate as well as being reported on local radio stations.

Wednesday (22 Oct Swansea, 12 Nov Erina)	
6:30pm	Introduction and refreshments
7.00pm	Working together as a group
7:30pm	Rules of engagement (workshop rules)
8.00pm	Activity
8:30pm	Close
Saturday (25 Oct Swansea, 15 Nov Erina)	
9:30am	Introduction and tea and coffee
10.00am	Presentation: An Overview of Climate Change
10:35am	Panel: What's happening in our community?
11:30am	Morning Tea
11:45am	What's happening in Local Government?
12:30pm	Light relief!
12:45pm	Breakout: What are your issues/ concerns relating to Climate Change?
1:30pm	Lunch
2:15pm	Making sense of your concerns & issues
3:30pm	Summing up and close
Sunday (26 Oct Swansea, 16 Nov Erina)	
9:30am	Introduction and tea and coffee
10.00am	Presentation: State response to aspects of Climate Change
10:30am	Fishbowl activity
11:00am	Morning Tea
11:30am	World Café 'How can we work together to respond to Climate Change?'
1:00pm	Lunch
1:40pm	Breakout: Consensus and reporting back
2:45pm	Where to from here?
2:55pm	Close



Communicating Outcomes

Gosford City Council

During February 2009, two participants from the Erina workshop delivered a one hour presentation to the Councillors and the entire Senior Management Team at Gosford City Council detailing the outcomes of the Local Forum.

The presentation generated some lively debate amongst the Councillors, with a full spectrum of opinion. Gosford Council's Director of Environment and Planning regarded the presentation as beneficial as it generated open and frank discussion amongst the Councillors and all present gained a better understanding of the opinions of their colleagues. Discussions continue as to how best to integrate the community's recommendations.

Lake Macquarie City Council

Swansea participants formally presented their recommendations to Council's Sustainability Manager, Quentin Espey in October 2008. Dr. Espey subsequently presented these recommendations to Council Executive.

Furthermore, in January 2009 council staff prepared an information report to Council outlining the recommendations from the Swansea Forum.

Many of the recommendations aligned with Council activities already in process including: support for community organisations, promotion of renewable energy sources, waste & resource management, provision of sustainable initiatives to business, whole of life carbon costs of Council activities, introduction of a Sustainability Levy and amendment of Development Control Plans to facilitate sustainability.

Some activities, such as development of cycling, car-pooling and stormwater harvesting infrastructure are subject to funding availability. Other activities, such as placing a moratorium on development in flood-prone areas, requires amendment to existing Council policies. The implications of these amendments are under consideration.

Wyong Shire Council

In follow up to the recommendations, through the Hunter Central Coast Regional Environmental Strategy, Council has applied for funding under the Australian Government's Local Adaptations Pathways Program, to undertake a climate change risk assessment for the community. Council plans to use the Local Forum recommendations developed to form the basis of community input for the project.

"I was very impressed that Council is actively seeking opinions from a cross section of the community and not just those with the loudest voices or the deepest pockets."

- Erina Local Forum participant

"The Local Forum provided a great opportunity to participate in local government decision making & meet people in my local community."

- Swansea Local Forum participant

Follow up and Continued Engagement

All participants were emailed a copy of the final report from both workshops. A thank you note was also sent out in the week after each Forum including information on the intended, or actual delivery, and acceptance of the reports by each Council.

Gosford City Council has continued discussion with several of the Erina forum participants, including organising a one on one conversation with the Mayor. Furthermore, a community climate change presentation was co-delivered in June 2009 by Gosford City Council staff and one of the Local Forum participants.

Some participants have also approached Gosford City Council with the view to developing an ongoing network where they can explore some of the key issues related to climate change.

The network would provide the group with the opportunity to explore their recommendations further and channel these recommendations to appropriate target groups. Council would not be in a position to coordinate this group but may assist with the provision of advice on the functions of Council and other government departments.

Furthermore, Lake Macquarie City Council's Sustainability Department invited all Swansea participants to attend a focus group workshop in February 2009 to consult the community on a proposed Sustainability Levy. Five participants from the original workshop attended this focus group and were pleased to provide input into the process and be part of an ongoing partnership with Council in a forum where they could be frank in presenting their viewpoint on the issues raised.

Challenges and Opportunities

One of the challenges faced by the Council partners was difficulty in recruiting participants for the local workshops. A relatively low response rate to the invitations sent out meant additional work and promotion was required to secure a representative pool of the local demographic.

A second challenge came in the form of ensuring the recommendations brought forward by the Local Forums were clearly articulated for Council use. Several of the recommendations overlapped between the three tiers of government making application problematic. In future workshops, additional guidance will be provided by a cross-section of Council Departments to ensure the recommendations produced can be easily integrated into Council planning.

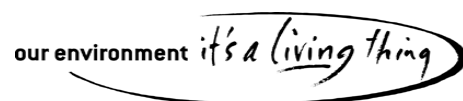
Despite these challenges, each of the Council partners felt the process of delivering these workshops was highly beneficial and has provided a valuable opportunity for non-environmentally active community members to be included in the consultation process whilst also providing significant professional development opportunities for the three local Project Coordinators/Educators.



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.

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

Council Reflections

The experience provided Council partners with key experiences in several areas. Firstly, the experience provided the three partners with the opportunity to develop a variety of skills and experience in running and engaging small group workshops. The deliberative democracy professional development workshop provided to Council facilitators at the commencement of the project was invaluable.

Furthermore, this project allowed the three Council partners to develop and deliver each workshop in collaboration. The team effort enhanced the workshops as the partners had peer support, pooled resources and greater opportunities to brainstorm ideas, share the workload at the workshops and utilize resources of all three Councils. The project was also enhanced by the different skills and knowledge of the staff from the three Councils.

Finally, ongoing support from the Nature Conservation Council was of a very high quality. Materials such as background information, media resources, phone support were all valuable resources when developing and delivering the Local Forums.

The success of the project has provided a model for further consultation and community engagement that each Council will utilise when working with the community on future projects.

“Since my involvement in the Local Forum I have taken more efforts to activate public opinion for change.”

– Erina Local Forum participant