



Coffs Harbour City Council & Bellingen Shire Council

Local Community Climate Summit Snapshot

Abstract

In November 2008, 14 local residents (18+ & selected to represent the Coffs Harbour and Bellingen demographic) attended a 2½ day forum hosted by Coffs Harbour City Council and 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

1500 properties within the Coffs Harbour LGA were randomly selected and invited to participate in the Local Forum. 16 applications were received through this process and a release run in the local paper gained a further 3 applications. In Bellingen, 500 properties were randomly selected and invited to attend, with 3 community members expressing interest.

Due to drop outs, a total of 14 community members participated in the combined Local Forum. As seen in Table 1 however, these 14 participants closely matched the preferred profile of the local community.

Table 1: Coffs Harbour and Bellingen Participant Representation based on 2006 ABS Census of Population and Housing

Characteristic	Residents %	Preferred 14	Profile 14
Gender	Total		
Male	48.6%	7	7
Female	51.4%	7	7
Total	100%	14	14
Age	>15		
15-24 years	15.6%	2	1
25-54 years	47.8%	7	7
55-64 years	15.8%	2	5
65 + years	20.8%	3	1
Total	100%	14	14

The Deliberative Process: Workshop Design & Recommendations

The Coffs Harbour-Bellingen Local Forum embraced the deliberative process by allowing time for participants to debate, enquire, reflect and take on new knowledge. The deliberative forum first heard from a range of local experts on climate change and related matters. An opportunity was provided for participants to develop a framework of questions, which were then posed to the experts. This enabled presenters to expand on issues and for participants to gain a greater depth of knowledge on their concerns.

It also helped participants gain “ownership” of the issues on which they would deliberate. Following the presentations, over six linked sessions the facilitators assisted participants’ progression through deliberative steps that focused them more closely on the ‘charge’ - *how can we work together to respond to climate change?*



The Deliberative Process: Workshop Design & Recommendations (cont.)

The 2½ day Local Forum agenda is as shown below:

Thursday 6 November 2008		Sunday 9 November 2008	
1830 -1900	Welcome	11.00-11.15	Consolidation of Day 1: What are the key climate change and related concerns that have emerged from Day 1?
1900-1930	Introductions	11.15-12.15	Small Group Session: Mitigating and adapting to climate change and related crises: Q1: What needs to be done to mitigate climate change and related crises? Q2: What needs to be done to adapt to climate change and related crises?
1900-1945	Briefings by CHCC and Facilitators	12.15-12.30	Group Reports
1945-2015	Q: What are the most important characteristics the Coffs Harbour-Bellingen region offers residents?	12.30-1.00	Lunch, with prioritisation activity
2015-2020	Participant Survey	1.00-2.30	Deliberation Session: What actions must we take? Q1: What can we do within our own resources? Q2: What external resources do we need to help us take action? Q3: What must Local Government do? Q4: What must State Government do? Q5: What must Federal Government do?
2020-2030	Mingling	2.30-2.55	Identify Priorities for Action
Saturday 8 November 2008		2.55-3.00	NCC Presentation: What comes next?
9.00 - 9.05	Welcome and Introductions	3.00-3.10	Afternoon Tea
9.05 - 9.10	Welcome to Country	3.10-3.40	Prepare verbal report for presentation to the Deputy Mayor
9.10-10.30	Panellist Presentations	3.40-3.45	Complete Workshop evaluation
10.30-10.45	Morning Tea	3.45-3.55	Present verbal report to the Deputy Mayor
10.45-11.15	Workshop - Develop Q's for panel	3.55-4.00	Close
11.15-12.30	Q&A with Panel		
12.30-1.15	Lunch		
1.15-1.30	Briefing on World Café process		
1.30-2.15	World Café: What does the information on climate change mean to us? Q1: How do you feel about climate change? Q2: What challenges from climate change & related crises are most important to you? Q3: How urgent do you think it is that we respond to climate change?		
2.15-2.30	Table Hosts Report on Findings		
2.30-2.45	Afternoon Tea		
2.45-3.30	Facilitated Small Groups: What are the most important issues in Climate Change? Q1: What climate change and related challenges do we face in our Region? Q2: What links those climate changes and related challenges?		
3.30-3.45	Groups Report back		
3.45-4.15	If we do nothing, what might our Region be like in 20 years?		
4.15-4.25	Transition to Action		
4.25-4.30	Tomorrow's Program		
Overnight:	Self-Reflection on Day 1: What are the key concerns/responses?		

Outcomes of the deliberations included 5 priority mitigation and adaptation recommendations for both local and state government, as well as brainstorming what the individual & community response should be.

Recommendations for Council included ensuring sustainable land use planning and catchment management, increasing investment into renewable technologies, increasing local sustainability education programs, and additional research and mapping of local climate change impacts.

At a state level, recommendations included removing subsidies supporting the coal industry, investment into a more efficient transport system, stopping the logging of old growth forest and increased partnership with indigenous Australians on land management issues.

Communicating Outcomes

The report of recommendations produced through the Local Forum has since been officially adopted by Council. Council has committed to addressing the recommendations in the development of the revised "Greenhouse Action Plan for our City", and the Coffs Harbour 2030 Plan - a blue print for the area's future planning. The Coffs Harbour 2030 Plan will be completed at the end of 2009 and the revised Greenhouse Action Plan is expected to be released in March 2010.

The Local Forum has also provided impetus for Council's further involvement in, and commitment to, the development of climate change initiatives. For example, in Bellingen Shire Council, a Sustainability Officer has recently been engaged and his primary focus will be matters of climate change and their amelioration.

Furthermore, an MOU has been signed between Bellingen Shire Council and the mature and cohesive environment lobby that actively engages and partners with Council. Particular areas of focus for this partnership will be renewable energy, a transition town initiative and progression through the ICLEI Cities for Climate Protection Program.

Reflections of the Local Forum participants give further weight to the benefits and positive outcomes of undertaking this deliberative democracy process:

"This forum has given me a feeling of connectedness with others from my area."

"I felt listened to and able to contribute through a process that was very well structured and clear."

"As a result of the local forum, I have a desire and motivation to get involved and to become incidental in creating a change."

"I found through this process we were really encouraged, and able, to give our ideas, as well as learn so much from other participants."

"The Local Forum was very enjoyable, hard work. It was highly educational and overall a very positive experience."

"As a result of the Local Forum I have realised the huge social implications of climate change, and this has made me even more serious about becoming active on this issue."



Follow up and Continued Engagement

Following the Local Forum, a certificate of appreciation was awarded to each participant, panellist and facilitator at a group presentation at Council's December 2008 Council meeting. Furthermore, participants were sent copies of the final report and Local Forum documentation for their own records.

At the beginning of 2009 several community events and meetings took place in Bellingen promoting the idea that the Shire become a Transition Town - an initiative that received much discussion during the Local Forum.

Several of the Local Forum participants have also gone on to start an official Coffs Harbour Transition Network for other community members who are interested in seeing this initiative become a reality.



Challenges and Opportunities

Undertaking a project of this scale brought both challenges, and opportunities to both Coffs Harbour City and Bellingen Shire, Councils. Some of the challenges identified included:

- Difficulty in getting people to commit to a 2-day weekend workshop;
- Difficulty in engaging 18-24 year olds in the process;
- Managing expectations of from various community members.

Many opportunities and benefits were identified however:

- Developed relationships with local climate change experts which has increased local knowledge;
- Gathering people together to talk about climate change;
- Sharing of ideas, discussion, arguments, and increased understanding around many local issues;
- Networking and building relationships across the local community.

Council Reflections

Overall, both Councils found the process to be uplifting, refreshing and exciting. While it took considerable time, energy and resources, those involved gained valuable experience and confidence.

The use of deliberative democracy was a new process but enabled the community to be engaged in a positive and representative way to deliberate over an important issue. This technique will be considered as a model for community engagement that both Councils will utilise again in the future.

To address some of the challenges however, future deliberative workshops will be scheduled over two Saturdays or two Sundays, rather than one whole weekend. This may encourage other people to participate and provide greater flexibility and processing time for those involved.

Find Out More

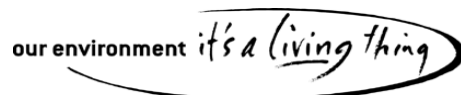
For more information on this project or to learn more about the NSW Community Climate Summit held in February 2009, please visit www.nccnsw.org.au/nswclimatesummit or contact the Nature Conservation Council of NSW on +612 9279 2466.



“As a result of the Local Forum, I have a desire and motivation to get involved and become incidental in creating change.”

- Coffs Harbour 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, Warringham, Blacktown, Holroyd, Penrith and Tumut