



# Penrith City Council Local Community Climate Summit Snapshot

## Abstract

In November 2008, 23 local residents, representative of the Penrith demographic, attended a 1 day forum hosted by Penrith City Council. This was as part of the NSW Community Climate Summit Project developed by the Nature Conservation Council of NSW and assisted by the NSW Government through its 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

Penrith City Council undertook a comprehensive and systematic recruitment strategy to invite a random and representative sample of participants to their initial 2 day Local Forum, planned for October. However, due to a low response rate, an alternative recruitment strategy and workshop approach were developed and a 1-day condensed local forum was instead convened in November 2008.

Recruitment for the Local Forum was via an open invitation delivered through multiple mediums including:

- a media release to local media outlets and Sydney radio stations (including ABC, 2GB, and 2UE);
- promotion via external events calendars (e.g. ABC national);
- advertisements in the local community gazette and a notice in the Mayors Column of the local paper;
- posters on community notice boards in local shopping centres, libraries, childcare centres, and neighbourhood centres;
- a direct invitation sent via existing networks and associations including the University of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Age, Little Athletics, Choral groups & Musical Societies, the Penrith Historical Society, Playgroup Association, Penrith Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Project, Nepean Art Society and;
- promotion via Council’s website, Sustainable Penrith Blog and on Facebook.

Characteristic	Residents %	Preferred 23	Profile 23
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Total</b>		
Male	49.5%	11	9
Female	50.5%	12	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>&gt;15</b>		
15-24 years	20.3%	5	2
25-54 years	56.3%	13	12
55-64 years	12.8%	3	3
65 + years	10.6%	2	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>21*</b>

Table 1: Penrith Participant Representation based on 2006 ABS Census of Population and Housing  
\* 2 participants did not disclose their age

This recruitment strategy was highly successful with a total of 23 community members participating in the Local Forum. As can be seen in Table 1, participants were generally representative of the local demographic in terms of gender and age and had varying professional backgrounds including health care, education, business, mining and defence.





## The Deliberative Process: Workshop Design & Recommendations

The focus of the Penrith Climate Change Forum was to discuss - *“How can we best work together to address Climate Change”*. In considering this point, Forum participants explored the following issues:

- “What are our concerns with regards to Climate Change – and why”
- “What can we do to reduce our impact on climate change”
- “What can we do to respond to the impacts of climate change”
- “What needs to be done by others so we can act”

The 1 day condensed Forum agenda was as follows:

### Session 1 – Introduction

Introduction to the workshop and processes

Icebreaker and introductions

### Session 2 – Expert Speakers

Guest Speaker: Climate Change - Prof. Peter Phibbs

Guest Speaker: Solar Technologies - Amber Ferguson

Facilitated Discussion

### Session 3 – Open Forum

Workshop – Responding to Climate Change

The two ‘local experts’ engaged to speak at the Forum provided participants with the knowledge to explore the issue of climate change as well as considering some of the opportunities available to assist in minimising and managing its effects.

Professor Peter Phibbs (Academic Course Coordinator for Urban Research Centre at University of Western Sydney) introduced participants to the basic science of climate change, its causes & potential impacts, the challenges it presents, & the role of agencies such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, & the wider community.

Amber Ferguson from Aussie Solar Installations provided a slightly different source for discussions. Her presentation focused on the opportunities available to respond to the issue of climate change - in particular, the use of alternative power sources, such as solar, as well as some of the opportunities and barriers to these types of technologies.

As a result of the deliberations, a series of recommendations for local and state government were developed. Some of these recommendations included improving urban planning, educating households on energy auditing, building community resilience, improving public transport services & assisting the formation of sustainable communities.

***“Everyone at the workshop had the opportunity to speak and voice their opinions. Even though we didn't always agree, we were able to talk through issues.”***

*– Penrith Local Forum participant*

## Communicating Outcomes

The findings of the Forum and related activities have been considered in the development of Council's current strategic plan, which was adopted on 29 June 2009.

Strategic Plan 2031 is Council's principal policy document, identifying the priorities and long term strategies for Council and the community. Included in the Strategic Plan 2031 are the directions to:

- Build our future on the principles of sustainability, & understand & respond to the effects of climate change on our region;
- Respond to the impacts of climate change and support the principles of sustainability;
- The strength of our future economy is built on sustainable businesses;
- Have access to an interconnected transport network, and our reliance on cars is reduced;
- Our path and cycleway network is safe, and encourages active movement around the City;
- The landscape values and productive capacity of the City's rural lands contribute to our future health, liveability and well-being;
- The City's ecological footprint is reduced by using sustainable methods of production, consumption and technologies.



The strategic directions contained within the Strategic Plan form the basis from which Council develops four year delivery programs and annual operational plans. These plans set out the actions required to achieve Council's longer term strategic directions.

The outcomes of the Local Forum have been, and will continue to be, considered in the development of future operational plans. The recommendations from the Local Forum are also being incorporated in the development of Council's Climate Change Strategy scheduled for release in 2009/2010. This plan will provide the strategic framework for future climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives.

## Follow Up and Continued Engagement

Feedback from Local Forum participants showed that 83% either agreed or strongly agreed that their involvement in the process had inspired them to become more active on environmental issues in their local community.

Furthermore, 100% of those who participated in the Local Forum agreed or strongly agreed that they felt their voice was heard during the deliberations and that their views contributed to the workshop outcomes.

In this way, significant benefit in terms of community empowerment and engagement can be seen to have been generated as a result of this project.

Council remains in contact with several Local Forum participants, providing them with further information (particularly around available rebates and low-income household retrofit programs) and updates on the progress of their recommendations.

Engagement and dialogue with participants will continue as the Climate Change Strategy is developed later this year and further community input and consultation is undertaken.

***“As a result of attending the Local Forum I am more conscious of the greater impacts of my actions, and the importance of talking with my friends and family about this and other issues.”***

***– Penrith Local***

***Forum participant***



## Challenges and Opportunities

Initially, participant recruitment proved to be a significant challenge. To engage participants in the original 2-day Forum planned, 2,500 personally addressed invitations were sent to randomly selected community members. The project was also promoted via articles in two local papers, web postings, and posters displayed at community & shopping centres. Phone calls were also made to over 200 community members who had received invitations and additional invitations were emailed to 30 established interest & community groups.

Despite these efforts, the event had to be cancelled due to a persistently low response rate. Feedback indicated the 2 day session was too high a level of commitment and so a 1-day condensed Forum was convened - proving highly effective.

Speaking with a broad range of community members however highlighted the need for climate change education and awareness programs and increased promotion of rebate & assistance programs. Council's Sustainability & Planning Department are now increasing their efforts to raise the profile of climate change and related initiatives throughout the community.

The most significant opportunity seized however

(through both the Local Forum and other Council activities to 'capture other voices') was the opportunity to enter into real conversations with the community on the issue of climate change.

Through the Local Forum, and by approaching people at two local events, Council was able to explore the views and concerns of the community in depth. These discussions provided invaluable insight into the diversity of opinion, level of concern, and desire for action surrounding the issue of climate change. By understanding the range of views in the community, as well as the reasoning behind these views, Council now has a much stronger position from which to respond to community needs.

## Council Reflections

Involvement in this project has seen Penrith City Council enter into real discussions with their community with regards to their concerns and thoughts surrounding the issue of climate change.

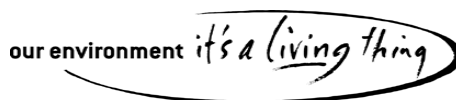
These conversations have provided Council with valuable insight into the values and opinions of the community, and the deliberative democracy facilitation skills developed by Council staff will allow this sort of community engagement technique to be utilised in the future.

***"I applaud Penrith Council for facilitating such a well organised event. It stimulated new ideas and directions."* – Penrith Local Forum participant**

## 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](http://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