DRAFT FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

MOUNT ALEXANDER ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY 2015-2025

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Introduction

Context

In the context of climate change, a growing human population, technological advancements, biodiversity decline and other trends, the decade ahead is a time for human culture to change.

The overarching challenge is to move from an exploitative relationship with our planet to a symbiotic one, both in spirit and action.

This symbiotic relationship will be realised in many ways. For example, by the rapid transition to renewable energy sources, the conscientious management of the natural environment, and the development of a culture where waste is minimised.

Aware of the vast opportunities and the need to take action, the Mount Alexander Shire Council Plan includes the goal of 'Building Sustainable Communities'.

Further, the Mount Alexander Shire Council Economic Development Plan positions the Shire as a focal point for the development of an age of 'lifestyle and sustainability'.

Purpose

The purpose of this Environment Strategy is to further define and communicate Council's strategic approach to its environmental stewardship role for the period 2015-2025.

Scope

The scope of the Environment Strategy is limited to the role of Council as a local government organisation.

Terms

In Mount Alexander Shire the terms 'sustainability' and 'environment' have often been used to distinguish between efforts focused on the built environment (sustainability) and efforts focused on the natural environment (environment).

This distinction has been helpful to clarify different roles. However, as issues such as climate change and native vegetation management require an integrated response, it is important that an inclusive term is used when discussing Council's environmental stewardship role.

'Ecologically sustainable development' (ESD) is a long-standing term, and it best defines the environmental stewardship role of Council.

ESD is defined in the *Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act (Victoria) 2003* as:

'Development that improves the total quality of life, both now and in the future, in a way that maintains the ecological processes on which life depends.'

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Our Land's First Custodians

Council acknowledges the Dja Dja Wurrung as the traditional owners of the lands and waters of the Mount Alexander Shire. Council also recognises all other Indigenous people of the Shire, and acknowledges the vital role that the traditional owners, the local Jaara people, played as custodians of the region.

Further, Council is committed to support reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the Shire, and encourage the local Aboriginal community to work with other community members to care for the environment – in particular to impart practical knowledge of how the Aboriginal community has cared for the land for many generations.

Role of Council

Council's ESD role is targeted to ensure that, as an organisation, Council:

- Meets its statutory obligations;
- Focuses on the 'big issues' as identified in Council strategic planning documents and in Council decisions;
- Is agile and actively pursues opportunities, including external partnerships and funding opportunities;
- Takes action where it can make a difference.

Council's core ESD roles relate to:

- Effective waste management;
- Protecting biodiversity by managing native vegetation;
- Responding to climate change; and
- Being a socially responsible business.

Community Aspirations

In developing the Mount Alexander Shire Council Plan, the community was asked to identify the word it associated most with the immediate future it would like for the Shire. The word 'sustainable' topped the list by a significant margin.

In developing this Environment Strategy, the Mount Alexander Shire community was asked to select, from a list of 28 community derived options, their top five ESD priorities.

Council received 301 responses. Ranked in order the respondent's top five priority areas were:

1. The Planning Scheme recognises and protects natural assets
2. Renewable energy
3. Environmentalism and sustainability become mainstream
4. Sustainable funding and support for Landcare and other community groups
5. Innovative waste management

These five community priorities influence Council's environmental stewardship role.

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Strategy

Vision

A Shire of sustainability, with healthy ecosystems in a rural/bush land environment and emitting zero nett carbon emissions.

A Council with a strong reputation for its environmental commitments and partnerships, acknowledged as a leader in local rural sustainable development nationally and internationally.

A community aware, proud and active in caring for the environment and living sustainably, where land owners and managers actively protect biodiversity, are strongly engaged and are supported by Council actions in natural environment, sustainability and waste management.

This vision has continued on from the Mount Alexander Environment Strategy 2011-2014. It speaks to the need for Council and the community to collaborate to create low carbon, low waste communities, in healthy natural ecosystems.

Functions

Council's vision will be realised in three ways:

1. Positions
2. Programs
3. Partnerships

These three functions support each other.

Clear positions articulate Council's stance and approach to ESD.

Well-considered programs address Council's core ESD roles.

Collaborative partnerships enable greater achievements.

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Positions

Priority Area 1: **Council leadership by example**

Council can show leadership in making environmentalism and sustainability mainstream in Mount Alexander Shire.

Council leadership can be expressed in many ways. For example, evidence-based policy statements regarding issues such as climate change, cost effective and appropriate eco-technologies such as LED streetlights, and using Council's unique statutory responsibilities to further ESD aims e.g. rate rebates for properties with a conservation covenant in place.

Long-Term Goal
Council is a nationally awarded leader in local government ESD

Intermediate Outcome
Council's ESD leadership is commended by the community

Council Roles

Position	Advance	Lead
Understand significant ESD issues and develop clear position statements.	Adopt appropriate technologies that provide environmental, social and economic benefits.	Use statutory responsibilities to progress ESD aims and otherwise demonstrate ESD leadership.

Key Strategic Tasks
➤ Providing incentives, funding etc.
➤ Investigating new opportunities for rates, rewards
➤ Trust for Nature Rebate

Links to Community Priority
Environmentalism and sustainability become mainstream

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Positions

Priority Area 2: **Ecologically Sustainable Development team as a corporate resource**

Improving the sustainability and environment of the Shire is the work and responsibility of all parts of Council.

This Priority Area formalises the advisory role of the ESD team to ensure that all the projects and services of Council fully consider waste, the natural environment, and climate change.

Providing early and ongoing internal ESD advice will assist in reducing risks and long-term costs. For instance, the design of a new, or the refurbishment of an existing significant infrastructure asset, may change when climate change projections for the municipality are fully considered.

When required, the ESD team will be the contact point to engage outside consultants with specialist expertise.

Long Term Goal
ESD is embedded in all Council operations

Intermediate Outcome
Council projects and services drive the ESD of the Shire

Council Roles

Define	Utilise	Consult
Define the environmental impacts of all Council projects and services.	Utilise internal ESD expertise to improve all projects and services.	Draw upon appropriate external ESD expertise and community wisdom when necessary and appropriate.

Key Strategic Tasks
➢ Council's internal Green Team helps embed ESD
➢ ESD team is involved in the governance of significant projects
➢ ESD team leads internal collaborative ESD projects
➢ ESD team leads internal training and information sharing

Links to Community Priority
Environmentalism and sustainability become mainstream

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Positions

Priority Area 3: **Reduce resource consumption across Council**

Council routinely seeks to minimise resource consumption in the delivery what we do and what we build. These efforts are ongoing.

A major focus for Council is to further improve its sustainable procurement practices. Sustainable procurement is about reducing the adverse, and increasing the beneficial, environmental, social and economic impacts of the products and services Council purchases and the way in which we use them.

The first stage in sustainable procurement is to determine if the purchase or use of the good or service is really needed, and if so, if there are alternatives to purchasing new goods.

Long-Term Goal
Sustainable procurement across all Council operations

Intermediate Outcome
Reduced resource consumption and financial savings

Council Roles

Query	Seek	Award	Verify	Recycle
Determine if the good or service is needed and if reduced or no consumption is possible.	Seek better products that fulfil the same need more sustainably e.g. carbon neutral 100% recycled paper.	Ensure evidence of ESD claims, and procure the good or service.	Follow up performance to ensure that the good or service meets or exceeds ESD claims.	Determine how the good is to be reused or recycled.

Key Strategic Tasks
➢ Greenhouse Action Plan
➢ Sustainable Water Use Plan
➢ Waste Management Plan

Links to Community Priority
Environmentalism and sustainability become mainstream

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Programs

Priority Area 4: **Improve waste management and resource recovery facilities and services**

Council provides kerbside rubbish and recycling collection, public litter collection, and two public transfer stations. Waste management facilities are located at Castlemaine and Maldon.

As a core Council service, it is vital to continually innovate and improve the delivery of waste and resource recovery within the Mount Alexander Shire. To this end, Council continues to examine its waste operations and research new and improved approaches.

Moving towards zero waste will require generating less waste from our activities, increasing the sustainable recovery of material for recycling and reprocessing, and reducing the damage to the environment created by waste disposal.

Long-Term Goal
Towards zero waste

Intermediate Outcome
A well-functioning and improving management regime

Council Roles

Identify	Innovate	Educate	Manage	Evolve
Identify the requirements of the community, and build relationships with groups who can assist Council in meeting these requirements.	Find more sustainable ways to deliver all waste services.	Educate the community on how they can contribute to making the management and delivery of waste management services more sustainable.	Manage waste facilities to maximise the diversion of waste from landfill.	Ensure compliance with legislation and best practice guidelines.

Key Strategic Tasks
➢ Waste Management Plan
➢ Castlemaine Waste Management Facility Master Plan

Links to Community Priority
Innovative waste management

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Programs

Priority Area 5: **Protect and manage priority natural environment assets**

Natural environment assets are places recognised as having high environmental value at a national, state, regional or local level. They provide a range of benefits to society – clean air and water, the control of pests, fertile soils, climate regulation and open space.

Mount Alexander has a diverse range of natural environment assets which occur across the range of land tenures.

Council has the lead management role for a diverse land portfolio, including municipal controlled roadsides, urban waterways, recreation reserves, disused gravel reserves, and old landfill sites. Across this portfolio many varied types and qualities of natural environment assets can be found. Council's focus will remain on protecting and enhancing high quality assets.

On private land many notable high quality assets also exist. Council, through its application of the state planning scheme, and through its rate and compliance functions, will seek to protect these high quality assets.

Long-Term Goal
Priority natural environment assets are in improved ecological condition

Intermediate Outcome
Priority natural environment assets are protected and managed

Council Roles

Leverage	Identify	Prioritise	Comply
Use the best available information and knowledge to make informed ecological decisions.	Continue to identify and assess high quality natural environment assets.	Focus on protecting and enhancing high quality assets.	Ensure compliance with relevant laws and the municipal planning scheme

Key Strategic Tasks
➢ Open Space Strategy
➢ Roadside Conservation Management Plan
➢ Rural Land Study
➢ Site management plans developed for priority areas e.g. urban waterways
➢ Vegetation Protection Overlays

Link to Community Priority
The Planning Scheme recognises and protects natural assets

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Programs

Priority Area 6: **Integrate our response to climate change**

Council, in considering the impact of climate change on its operations, is moving towards an integrated response. Climate change projections will become part of all strategic deliberations.

One of the most important climate change responses across society is to start using clean renewable energy, and to keep using it. Council will actively transition to renewable energy across its operations including transport. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions from Council's landfill will also be a key focus.

Long-Term Goal
Zero net carbon emissions

Intermediate Outcome
Climate change considerations integrated into strategic decisions

Council Roles

Understand	Engage	Adapt	Mitigate	Seek
Council understands climate change science and policy, and the implications for the municipality.	Council engages internally, and with the community to develop a cooperative response to climate change.	Council manages the vulnerability of Council assets and services to climate change.	Council reduces its greenhouse gas emissions, especially from the Castlemaine landfill and through the transition to renewable energy.	Council seeks external funding to respond to climate change; promoting the Shire as a living laboratory for climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Key Strategic Tasks
➢ Implement Regional Climate Change Adaptation Plan
➢ Emergency Response Plan
➢ Greenhouse Action Plan

Links to Community Priority
Renewable energy

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Partnerships

Priority Area 7: **Enable the community to take action**

Enabling the community to take action is an important aspect of Council's role as it allows ESD to be achieved at a greater rate.

Council provides free sustainable living education through workshops and information. It also provides direct financial assistance, for example, through community grants.

Council enables the community in many other ways too, for example through the development of memoranda of understanding with key ESD groups, and through local and regional collaborations.

Importantly, Council advocates for State and Commonwealth Government funding to realise the community desire for sustainable communities in a healthy natural environment.

Long-term Goal
All interested residents and business are involved in ESD

Intermediate Outcome
Council support enables tangible ESD benefits for the community

Council Roles

Educate	Facilitate	Support	Fund
Provide information and educational opportunities for Shire residents and businesses.	Create opportunities for groups and individuals to connect and collaborate in taking action.	Provide support through non-financial means such as memoranda of understanding, and advocating for State and Commonwealth funding.	Provide direct grants and rebates to support those seeking to demonstrate ESD leadership.

Key Strategic Tasks
➢ Community Grants Program
➢ Sustainable Living Workshop Series
➢ Memoranda of Understandings
➢ E-newsletter

Link to Community Priority
Sustainable funding and support for Landcare and other community groups

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Partnerships

Priority Area 8: **Collaborate with external organisations**

Council will maintain existing and develop new relationships and alliances such as the Lighting the Regions project and the North Central Catchment Management Authority's Kyneton Woodlands project.

It will also advocate the importance of collaboration to government funders and work with local partners to develop shared projects and services.

Long-term Goal
ESD collaborations attract significant external funding

Intermediate Outcome
Collaborative ESD projects deliver tangible community benefits

Council Roles

Maintain	Cultivate	Advocate	Collaborate
Maintain and strengthen existing collaborations at the state, regional and local levels. For example, through the Central Victoria Greenhouse Alliance.	Cultivate new regional collaborative relationships, beginning with the development of a new regional natural environment management group.	Advocate the importance of council collaboration to state and commonwealth government funders, including the importance of support to Landcare and other community groups.	Work with local partners to develop shared projects and services. For example, waste reduction projects.

Key Strategic Tasks
➢ Fit-for-purpose collaborations
➢ Continue membership of Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance
➢ Establish a Natural Environment Regional Alliance

Link to Community Priority
Sustainable funding and support for Landcare and other community groups

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Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

Following the community comment period, Council's priority areas will be finalised, and a monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework will be developed for the Strategy.

End.

When you have completed your comments, please save on your computer, and then send with 'Draft Environment Strategy' in the email subject line to
info@mountalexander.vic.gov.au

You are welcome to include your contact details in the content of your email.

An electronic copy of the final Strategy will be sent to all respondents.

The closing date for written public submissions is midnight, Thursday 14 May 2015.

Thank you for your input.