

## **SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE - MEMBERSHIP APPOINTMENTS**

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Report Author: Executive Officer - Climate and Nature  
Responsible Officer: Director Planning and Sustainable Futures  
Ward(s) affected: All

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*The author(s) of this report and the Responsible Officer consider that the report complies with the overarching governance principles and supporting principles set out in the Local Government Act 2020.*

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

This item has been included in the public agenda to facilitate openness and transparency in Council's decision making. A confidential attachment has been included with the report which contains personal information that is not to be disclosed whilst the meeting is open to the public.

### **SUMMARY**

The Sustainable Environment Advisory Committee (SEAC) is comprised of community representatives, Councillors, Council staff and agency representatives. Community volunteers, selected for their demonstrated interest or expertise in environmental matters serve for three years, providing local knowledge and insight about a broad range of environmental topics.

Since the original SEAC appointments made at the 23 November 2021 Council meeting, there have been five resignations from the Committee. An interim recruitment process has been conducted for the final year of the Committee's term in line with the Terms of Reference. Expressions of interest were sought from community with 15 responses received including five from young people. There are five members recommended for Council approval, inclusive of two young people.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

*That*

- 1. Council**
  - (a) Formally appoint the recommended individuals to the Sustainable Environment Advisory Committee for the 2024-2025 term.**
  - (b) Note that the Terms of Reference be updated at the end of the current Committee term in 2025.**
- 2. The Confidential Attachment to this report remain confidential indefinitely as they relate to matters specified under section 3(1)(f) of the Local Government Act 2020.**

## **RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS**

Council Meeting 23 November 2021 – Council formally endorsed the Sustainable Environment Advisory Committee (SEAC) for the 2022 – 2025 term.

## **DISCUSSION**

### ***Purpose and Background***

SEAC's purpose is to provide Yarra Ranges Council with informed and constructive advice, input and support, to help guide the Council on environmental sustainability issues and initiatives relevant to the management and stewardship of the natural environment within the municipality.

This Report seeks to fill vacancies on the Committee by appointing the recommended community members (Attachment 1 *Confidential*), for formal appointment to the Sustainable Environment Advisory Committee for the final year of the Committee's term, 2024-2025.

Under the Committee's Terms of Reference, the Committee will consist of thirteen (13) voting community members. The specific membership will include:

- Ten (10) general community representatives
- One (1) community representative with links to the indigenous community
- Two (2) or more positions for young people with an interest in developing knowledge and networks within the environment sector

There are currently six vacancies on the Committee including:

- Three (3) general member positions
- Two (2) youth member positions
- One (1) member with links to the indigenous community

The recruitment to these positions involved an expression of interest process with advertising between 17 October and 5 November 2023. There was good interest from community for the single year period for both the general and youth positions, with many qualified and experienced individuals applying.

After the finalisation of recruitment, an induction session for both new and existing members will be scheduled at the first committee meeting for the year in February 2024. This session will inform members about Council's expectations and ensure they are equipped to make meaningful contributions to fostering a healthy, safe, and productive committee environment.

### ***Options considered***

Out of the 15 applications received, respondents were requested to provide details about their connection with Yarra Ranges, their involvement in local community activities, and their interest in joining the Sustainable Environment Advisory Committee.

All applicants showcased a strong affiliation with Yarra Ranges and diverse levels of experience in environmental issues. Applications were evaluated by two senior officers, considering the applicant's connection with Yarra Ranges, previous committee involvement, application quality, and the diversity of skills to complement existing committee members.

Officers shortlisted five outstanding candidates from a highly competitive pool, and these finalists underwent phone interviews with the EO Climate and Nature to validate application details, assess communication styles, and understand their approach to handling conflicting views. The interview outcomes affirmed the earlier shortlisting process, leading to the recommendation of all five candidates for appointment.

### ***Recommended option and justification***

The recommended appointments to the vacancies for the period of 2024-25 are listed in the confidential attachment to this report.

From the applications, five appointments are proposed to fill the three vacant general member positions, and two youth member positions. No applications were received for a member with links to the indigenous community.

## **FINANCIAL ANALYSIS**

This decision has no financial implications. Committee members provide their time and expertise voluntarily and do not receive any financial allowance for their involvement.

## **APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES**

This report contributes to the following strategic objective(s) in the Council Plan:

- Protected & Enhanced Natural Environment.

Key relevant Council strategies include:

- The Environment Strategy 2015-2025
- Liveable Climate Plan 2020-2030
- Nature Plan 2023-2033
- Integrated Water Management Plan 2017
- Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025
- Economic Development Strategy 2022-2032

## **RELEVANT LAW**

The proposed representatives align with the requirements of the *Gender Equality Act 2020* in ensuring diverse representation.

The Yarra Ranges Council *2021 Community Engagement Policy* includes advisory committees as part of its community engagement methodology, in line with addressing engagement requirements outlined in the *Local Government Act 2020*.

## **SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

### ***Environmental Impacts***

The committee serves as a vital avenue for community engagement on environmental matters. The committee brings extensive environmental expertise, passionately advocating and providing invaluable counsel to Council regarding sustainability issues. Committee members concentrate on the thoughtful and thorough management and stewardship of the environment, consistently delivering insights and advice aimed at securing a sustainable future for Yarra Ranges.

### ***Social Impacts***

SEAC's social impacts are numerous, firstly providing community voice and representation on crucial local environmental matters. By actively participating in the decision-making process, the committee becomes a vital means of influencing Council projects and strategies, ensuring they incorporate the needs and aspirations of the people residing in Yarra Ranges. Additionally, the committee enables a collaborative approach to engagement regarding improving environmentally conscious social behaviours and stewardship.

### ***Economic Impacts***

By providing advice on strategic work, SEAC contributes to maintaining a healthy environment, preserving regional attraction, sustaining productivity, and ensuring the long-term upkeep of natural assets. This, in turn, fosters economic value for the community through initiatives such as sustainable nature-based tourism.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The expression of interest for SEAC membership was advertised on Council's website, on social media and through the environmental volunteer's newsletter and the Council Newsletter.

## **COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

Not relevant. No collaboration with other Councils, Governments or statutory bodies was sought or required.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

SEAC enables a connection with the community interested in environmental issues and creates an opportunity for environmental decisions to be informed by community perspectives. Filling the vacant positions on the Committee for its final year will strengthen the Committee's capacity to provide advice and feedback on a broad range of environmental topics.

A key issue for SEAC is the retention of members, particularly in relation to young people. To mitigate this challenge, a thorough induction will be conducted with the new and existing members in early 2024.

In line with best practice governance, it is recommended to regularly monitor and review Terms of Reference for Advisory Groups. As the current Committee is in the final year of their term, alignment with other Council Advisory Committees reference terms will be assessed.

## **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

No officers and/or delegates acting on behalf of the Council through the Instrument of Delegation and involved in the preparation and/or authorisation of this report have any general or material conflict of interest as defined within the *Local Government Act 2020*.

## **ATTACHMENTS TO THE REPORT**

1. Sustainable Environment Advisory Committee Membership Appointments