

SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE & MEMBERSHIP APPOINTMENTS

Report Author: Executive Officer - Climate
Responsible Officer: Director Planning & Sustainable Futures
Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

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 is intended to be considered at a Council meeting that is open to the public. 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

Yarra Ranges Council Advisory Committees play a key role in demonstrating local leadership and working directly with community on important matters for Council.

The Sustainable Environment Advisory Committee (SEAC) is comprised of community representatives, Councillors, and staff with an interest and/or expertise in sustainability and environmental matters. The Committee provides local insight and advice to support Council decision making.

This report provides Council with an updated Terms of Reference to guide SEAC over the next four-year term, along with a recommendation to formally appoint twelve community representatives to SEAC following an extensive recruitment process.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1. That Council**
 - (a) Adopt the updated Sustainable Environment Advisory Committee Terms of Reference generally in accordance with Attachment 1.**
 - (b) Formally appoint the recommended individuals to the Sustainable Environment Advisory Committee for the 2025-2029 term.**
 - (c) The Confidential Attachment to this report remains confidential indefinitely as they relate to matters specified under section 3(1)(f) of the Local Government Act 2020.**

RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

Council Meeting 30 January 2024 – Council formally endorsed the appointment of the recommended individuals to the Sustainable Environment Advisory Committee (SEAC) for the remainder of the 2021-2025 term and noted that the Terms of Reference were to be updated at the end of the current term.

DISCUSSION

Purpose and Background

The purpose of the Sustainable Environment Advisory Committee (SEAC) is to provide Yarra Ranges Council with informed and constructive advice, input and support on environmental sustainability issues and initiatives relevant to the management and stewardship of the natural environment within the municipality.

This Report provides Council with an updated Terms of Reference and establishes the next term of the Committee by appointing the recommended community representatives (Attachment 2 Confidential) for the period 2025-2029.

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

- Up to 10 general community representatives
- One community representative with links to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Community (if available)
- Two or more positions for young people with an interest in developing knowledge and networks within the environment sector (if available).

The Committee is supported by:

- Two Councillors nominated by Council;
- Three Council Officers including:
 - a) Manager Resilient Environment
 - b) Executive Officer for the Committee, nominated by the Manager Resilient Environment at the first meeting of each calendar year
 - c) Committee Administrator to be appointed by the Manager Resilient Environment.

Options considered

The recruitment to these positions involved an Expression of Interest process with advertising occurring between 16 August and 15 September 2024. There was good interest from community for both the general and youth positions, with many qualified and experienced individuals applying.

A total of 25 applications were received for general membership, and eight applications for youth membership. No applications from community representatives with links to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community were received,

however additional recruitment is underway to support the inclusion of a representative. This is in line with the Terms of Reference, and Council's Reconciliation Action Plan commitments.

Applications were shortlisted to 12 general applications and four youth applications by officers. Shortlisted candidates participated in an online interview led by the Executive Officer Nature.

Candidates were interviewed and assessed for their alignment with Yarra Ranges Council values, communication style and to ensure they could contribute to a diverse and inclusive committee environment. These interviews confirmed a final list of nominees for appointment to serve the four-year term. Three nominees are returning members, ensuring continuity of knowledge.

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

The SEAC Terms of Reference has also been reviewed and updated to align with the Yarra Ranges Council Governance Framework for Advisory Committees. The review was completed by the Executive Officer Nature, with support from the Governance team. The draft Terms of Reference were also reviewed by the previous SEAC cohort.

Key changes to the Terms of Reference include:

- Removal of reference to agencies as potential SEAC members
- Length of term extended from three to four years
- Updating duration of service - members cannot serve more than two consecutive terms without a break.

This is to encourage new ideas and input and provide opportunities to a greater number of community representatives, particularly given the high level of interest and highly competitive Expression of Interest process.

Recommended option and justification

The recommended appointments to the Sustainable Environment Advisory Committee for the period of 2025-2029 are listed in the confidential attachment to this report.

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.

Advisory Committees of Council are funded through operational budgets, including Officer time and a small catering budget of no more than \$500 per year.

APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES

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

- Protected and Enhanced Natural Environment.

Key relevant Council strategies include:

- Nature Plan 2024-2034
- Reconciliation Action Plan 2024-2026
- Stormwater Management Plan 2024-2034
- Community Waste and Resource Recovery Plan 2023-2030
- Economic Development Strategy 2022-2032
- Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025
- Integrated Transport Strategy 2020-2040
- Liveable Climate Plan 2020-2030
- Environment Strategy 2015-2025
- Integrated Water Management Plan 2017.

RELEVANT LAW

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

The Yarra Ranges Council Community Engagement Policy 2024-2028 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

Economic Implications

By providing advice on Council's strategic work, SEAC contributes to maintaining a healthy environment, increasing the attraction of the region, and ensuring the long-

term protection of natural assets. This in turn fosters economic value for the community through initiatives such as sustainable nature-based tourism.

Social Implications

The social impacts of SEAC are numerous, firstly by providing community voices 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 of Yarra Ranges.

Additionally, the committee enables a collaborative approach to engagement regarding improving environmentally conscious social behaviours and stewardship.

Environmental Implications

The committee serves as a critical avenue for community engagement on environmental matters, bringing 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 ensuring a sustainable future for Yarra Ranges.

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.

The Terms of Reference were reviewed by outgoing Committee members.

COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

No collaboration with other Councils, Governments or statutory bodies was sought or required.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The SEAC enables a connection with the community interested in environmental issues and creates an opportunity for environmental decisions to be informed by community perspectives. A new cohort of members will strengthen 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 returning members in early 2025.

The Terms of Reference has also been updated to further reflect Council's commitment to a safe, supportive and collaborative committee environment.

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 Terms of Reference 2025-2029
2. Confidential - Sustainable Environment Advisory Committee Membership Appointments