



Sustainable Environmental Advisory Committee

Terms of Reference

Version:	1.6
Adopted by Council:	TBC
Next Update:	December 2029
Responsible Officer:	Nominated Executive Officer
Department:	Resilient Environment
Contact Officer:	Manager Resilient Environment

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Yarra Ranges Council recognises the benefit from networks and connections with community groups and advisory committees. Advisory committees and groups allow for the provision of technical advice, local knowledge, and support in specialised issues.
- 1.2 The Environment Strategy sets out the strategic direction for making Yarra Ranges a place of thriving communities, at home in healthy landscapes. It reflects Council's commitment to demonstrate leadership on environmental issues and working closely with the community and agencies to foster environmental stewardship across the municipality.
- 1.3 The Committee does not have authority to make decisions on behalf of Council and nor does it have delegated authority to act or to incur expenditure on behalf of Council.
- 1.4 The Committee must at all times recognise that the primary responsibility for management of Council's operations is controlled by the Chief Executive Officer and that the Committee, at all times, is an advisory committee to Council.
- 1.5 While comprising diverse interests and representatives, the Committee will not be seen as the only means for the Council to engage and consult within the municipality on environmental issues. The Council will continue to engage with the broader Yarra Ranges community on important matters warranting consultation.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 The Sustainable Environment Advisory Committee (the Committee) has been established by Council for the purpose of:
 - a) Providing advice to Council on implementing its environmental, climate action and biodiversity objectives as outlined in Council's Environment Strategy, Liveable Climate Plan, Nature Plan, Community Waste and Resource Recovery plan and related policies.
 - b) Contributing to the consultation process of broader Council driven projects, processes and policies that may impact on environmental, climate action and biodiversity objectives.
 - c) Contributing local knowledge and technical expertise to support Council's decision making on:
 - i. Climate change mitigation and adaptation
 - ii. Protection and enhancement of biodiversity and natural ecosystems

- iii. Sustainable resource management including water and waste
 - iv. Environmental stewardship and community engagement.
- d) Providing feedback on Council's progress toward its established environmental targets.
 - e) Identifying emerging environmental challenges and opportunities that may impact Council's ability to achieve its sustainability objectives.
 - f) Supporting Council in engaging with and building capacity among community stakeholders to promote environmental stewardship.
 - g) Supporting Council to foster partnerships between community groups, businesses and other levels of government to deliver positive environmental outcomes.

3. Mission Statement

- 3.1 The Committee provides advice and stakeholder perspectives to support Council in:
 - a) Protecting and enhancing the municipality's natural environment and biodiversity
 - b) Building community resilience to climate change impacts
 - c) Transitioning to renewable energy and sustainable resource use
 - d) Engaging the community in environmental stewardship.

4. Committee Structure

- 4.1 The Committee will include up to thirteen community members, appointed in conjunction with the selection criteria included at paragraphs 5.4 and 5.5, together with up to two Councillors appointed by Council and three Council staff.
- 4.2 Members will be appointed as individuals based on their qualifications and experience to be part of the Committee to undertake the role.
- 4.3 The thirteen members of the Committee should comprise:
 - a) Two Councillors nominated by Council;
 - b) Up to ten general community members;
 - c) One community representative with links to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community (if available);
 - d) Two or more positions for young people with an interest in developing knowledge and networks within the environment sector (if available); and
 - e) Three Council Officers including:
 - i) Manager Resilient Environment;

- ii) “Executive Officer” for the Committee, nominated by the Manager Resilient Environment at the first meeting of each calendar year.
- iii) “Committee Administrator” to be appointed by the Manager Resilient Environment.

4.4 Additional members may be invited to join the Committee for a defined period to address specialised needs as identified and agreed to by the Committee.

Establishing working groups

4.5 The Committee may establish special interest work groups to progress specific initiatives for a defined period of time. A working group may also invite individuals and groups to attend their meetings for the purpose of providing specialist advice, in accordance with paragraph 8.3.

4.6 Working groups can present opportunities and issues to the wider Committee, upon request to the Committee’s Executive Officer.

5. Nomination, selection & appointment of members

5.1 Expression of interest from individuals will be called through Council’s website, local media and by communications to local community organisations.

5.2 Applications for membership must be made in writing, address to the Executive Officer.

5.3 Applications will be considered against the selection criteria and short-listed applicants will be interviewed by a selection panel, to be appointed by the Executive Officer.

5.4 Members of the Committee will, as far as possible, be representative of the community, with reference to:

- a) Ability;
- b) Age;
- c) Gender and gender identification;
- d) Geographical location;
- e) Cultural background; and
- f) Socio-economic status.

5.5 All members must:

- a) Live or work in Yarra Ranges;
- b) Have a demonstrated interest, skills, experience or background relevant to environmental fields such as water management, biodiversity conservation, energy, climate change, sustainable development and transport, waste recovery or environment planning.
- c) Have knowledge of Yarra Ranges and issues impacting the local environment;
- d) Be able to commit to attending the regular meetings of the Committee; and
- e) Have a passion for working with Council to support environmental management.

Terms of Appointment

- 5.6 Community members will be appointed for a four-year term and may reapply to be appointed to the Committee on the expiry of their first four-year term, but no person should serve more than two consecutive terms, unless exceptional circumstances are identified by Council.
- 5.7 Unless determined otherwise, a community member who has served two consecutive terms as a member of the Committee may apply to be appointed again after a one-year break from the Committee.
- 5.8 Councillors are appointed to the Committee by Council for a four-year term. Notwithstanding the term of appointment, Council will consider and reaffirm this on an annual basis, while reserving the right to change its appointed representative at any time.
- 5.9 All appointments required to be made to the Committee will be submitted in a report by the Executive Officer to a Council meeting for determination.

6. Induction

- 6.1 A workshop will be held to enable Committee members to be inducted into their role. This will provide information on:
 - a) The role of the Committee;
 - b) The role of Council and Councillors;
 - c) Council processes e.g. timelines for programs, strategy development, advocacy positions;
 - d) Confidentiality and Code of Conduct;
 - e) The processes involved in achieving change;
 - f) Cultural awareness and accepted positions of Council; and
 - g) The importance of team building and developing trust within the group.
- 6.2 Within 24 months of a member's appointment to the Committee, the Executive Officer will conduct a review with individual members on their experiences as part of the Committee. This aims to identify any information, supports or steps that may assist the member in fulfilling their role on the Committee.

7. Vacancies

- 7.1 A position is deemed vacant if a member fails to attend four consecutive meetings without being granted a leave of absence by the Committee. Members with low attendance rates may be asked to retire their position to allow new members an opportunity to contribute.
- 7.2 Where a member decides to relinquish their membership before the end of their term of appointment, they must submit their resignation in writing, addressed to the Executive Officer.
- 7.3 Council reserves the right to fill a vacancy that may occur before the end of a four-year term of appointment, with the exception of a vacancy that occurs within two months of the end of the term of appointment.

- 7.4 All recommendations regarding the filling of vacancies mid-term or appointment of additional members will be submitted by the Executive Officer to the Chairperson for approval in consultation with the Manager Resilient Environment.

8. Co-opted members and specialist advice

- 8.1 The Committee may invite suitably skilled persons to join the Committee as a co-opted member for a specified purpose and period of time. A co-opted member would join the Committee in an advisory capacity only.
- 8.2 A member of the Committee who has already served two consecutive four-year terms may be invited to join the Committee as co-opted member to act as a mentor to newly appointed members for a set period of time.
- 8.3 Individuals and groups may be invited to attend meetings of the Committee for the purpose of providing specialist advice. Any such individual or Group must not be involved in decision making processes and must not vote on any matter. This may include representatives from agency partners such as Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria, Sustainability Victoria, and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.

9. Chairperson

- 9.1 The Chairperson will be a Councillor, appointed by Council.
- 9.2 The Chairperson will be the public face of the Committee and will lead advice and reports to the Council and other bodies on behalf of the Committee.
- 9.3 The Committee may appoint a Deputy Chairperson, whose role would be to perform the duties of the Chairperson if the Chairperson is absent or unable to perform their duties at a meeting of the Committee. If a Deputy Chairperson is not appointed, the Manager Resilient Environment may perform the duties of the Chairperson.

10. Meetings

- 10.1 At least six meetings of the Committee will be held per year, with these to be held at an accessible venue in the Yarra Ranges and/or via video conference (to be determined by the Executive Officer after consultation with the Chairperson).
- 10.2 Meetings may be cancelled, or additional meetings may be convened, by the Executive Officer after consultation with the Chairperson.
- 10.3 If apologies are received from a significant number of the members of the Committee, meetings may be cancelled and rescheduled (if feasible) by the Executive Officer after consultation with the Chairperson.
- 10.4 Members are asked to check their email on the morning of the meeting to receive any notice of cancellation.
- 10.5 Meetings of the Committee are defined as “Informal Meetings of Councillors” under Chapter 8, Rule 1 of Council’s Governance Rules if at least one Councillor is present. The Executive Officer must forward a record of an Informal Meeting of Councillors to Council’s Governance Team within 7 days of a meeting to enable

this to be tabled at the next convenient Council meeting and recorded in the Minutes of that Council meeting.

11. Code of Conduct for Committee members

- 11.1 All members of the Committee, as Council volunteers, are bound to act within the Yarra Ranges Council's Code of Conduct.
- 11.2 When acting in their capacity as a member of the Committee, all members will be respectful of others and refrain from discriminating, harassing or bullying other people and using offensive language.
- 11.3 In performing their role, a committee member must:
 - a) Act honestly,
 - b) Exercise reasonable care and diligence,
 - c) Not make improper use of their position, and
 - d) Not make improper use of the information acquired because of their position.
- 11.4 The failure of a member to comply with the above may result in the termination of their appointment to the Committee.
- 11.5 Committee members will also have regard to the principles of health and safety and must ensure that they contribute to the notion of a healthy and safe workplace.

12. Confidentiality and Privacy

- 12.1 Members must treat information they receive as confidential, unless otherwise advised, and are expected to comply with the provisions that cover confidential information contained in sections 3 and 125 of the *Local Government Act 2020*.
- 12.2 It is recognised that members of the Committee may receive confidential or sensitive information that should not be disclosed without the consent of Council Officers or the Yarra Ranges Council Chief Executive Officer. Members must not use confidential information other than for the purpose of performing their function as a member of the Committee.
- 12.3 Documents presented to the Committee will often be in draft format and not suitable for wider distribution. Members have an obligation not to disclose any materials or information that is not available to the public, unless approved by the Chair or a representative of Council.
- 12.4 All Committee discussions should comply with the requirements under the *Privacy Act 1988* and its principles.
- 12.5 The failure of a member to comply with paragraphs 12.1 to 12.4 will result in termination of their appointment to the Committee.

13. Conflict of Interest

- 13.1 A member of the Committee with a real or perceived conflict of interest in an item of business to be considered at a meeting must declare this before the item is considered.

- 13.2 A member declaring a conflict of interest must leave the meeting while the identified item is being discussed and must not vote on the matter being considered.
- 13.3 A declaration of a conflict of interest that has been made at a meeting of the Committee must be recorded in the minutes of that meeting and in the Informal Meeting of Councillors record to be submitted to Council.
- 13.4 A failure to comply with the provisions regarding the disclosure of conflicts of interest may result in the member's appointment to the Committee being terminated.
- 13.5 A Councillor appointed to the Committee must declare a conflict of interest in accordance with the requirements of Chapter 7, Rule 7, of Council's Governance Rules.

14. Attendance at Meetings

Submitting Apologies

- 14.1 Members should submit any apologies to the Executive Officer or the Committee Administrator if they are unable to attend, with these to be received at least 24 hours prior to a scheduled meeting time (where possible).

Requesting a Leave of Absence

- 14.2 If a member is likely to be absent from at least four consecutive meetings and wishes to remain as a member of the Committee, they should request a leave of absence.
- 14.3 Any such request should be submitted to the Chair and the Executive Officer.
- 14.4 The Chair and Executive Officer will not unreasonably withhold their approval of a leave of absence request.

15. Meeting Procedures

Agenda for Meetings

- 15.1 Council will be responsible for setting the agenda for each meeting.
- 15.2 Committee members may request an item to be included on an Agenda by sending to the Executive Officer at least ten days prior to the meeting.
- 15.3 The Executive Officer will consider any such requests and determine if they are to be listed or dealt with as per normal business given discussion on operational issues should be directed to the appropriate Council Officer.
- 15.4 The Agenda for each meeting will include:
 - a) An opportunity for members to disclose a conflict of interest;
 - b) Provision for any urgent items of business to be raised and, by agreement, considered by the Committee;
 - c) Brief reports back on:
 - i. the use of the Committee's advice by Council; and
 - ii. actions and/or matters arising from items discussed at the previous meeting;
 - d) Updates on current Council programs and initiatives;

- e) Substantive discussion about major current issues and directions; and
 - f) An opportunity to raise other business matters from the table.
- 15.5 An agenda will be sent to the Committee one week prior to each meeting, together with any background reading material.

Decision Making

- 15.6 A quorum of at least five members must be present if a formal committee meeting is to be held.
- 15.7 No formal business shall be conducted by the Committee unless a quorum exists. If a quorum is not present, the Chairperson may decide that the Committee meet for discussion only.
- 15.8 Any decisions in respect of formal advice and/or comment to be provided to Council by the Committee will be reached by consensus. As far as practicable the Committee will provide advice to Council based on the collective wisdom of its members, supported by the best available information provided by Council Officers.
- 15.9 A diversity of views may be expressed by the Committee and these will be reflected in any reports and statements issued by the Committee.

Minutes of Meetings

- 15.10 Minutes will be taken for each meeting by the nominated Committee Administrator and will record:
- a) The attendance of members;
 - b) Agenda items tabled;
 - c) Any declared conflicts of interest;
 - d) Key discussion points; and
 - e) Actions and agreed outcomes only.
- 15.11 Minutes and action items will be distributed to each member of the Committee and relevant Council staff within two working weeks of the meeting.
- 15.12 Minutes will be finalised only when formally adopted at the following scheduled meeting of the Committee.
- 15.13 Minutes will appear on Council's website for public viewing after their formal adoption.

16. Reporting

- 16.1 The Chairperson will make a Delegate's Report at the next Council meeting following a Committee meeting.
- 16.2 The Committee will contribute to an Annual Report to Council in combination with Council's other Advisory Committees. The Annual Report will provide information on the Committee's activities over the previous 12-month period and detail the Committee's key plans and goals over the upcoming 12 months.
- 16.3 The Annual Report will be made by the Executive Officer, with others deemed appropriate by the Executive Officer after consultation with the Chairperson and Council's Governance team.

17. Management and support to the Committee

- 17.1 The Committee Administrator will provide administrative support to the Committee, which will include:
- a) Maintaining contact details of members;
 - b) Preparing and distributing Agendas and prior reading material;
 - c) Preparing and distributing Minutes of meetings;
 - d) Reporting on actions and/or matters arising from previous meetings back to the committee;
 - e) Circulating other material to Committee members as necessary;
 - f) Completing and submitting an Informal Meeting of Councillors record for inclusion on a Council Agenda;
 - g) Maintaining a web page for the Committee on Council's website;
 - h) Assisting with the preparation of an Annual Report to Council; and
 - i) Managing all other administrative processes associated with the Committee.
- 17.2 The Committee will have access to Council staff with relevant expertise on matters being considered by the Committee.

18. Support Available to Community Representatives

- 18.1 Community members are eligible for assistance, e.g. cab vouchers, to support their attendance at meetings and involvement with the Committee.
- 18.2 Community representatives should raise any individual participation or access requirements with the Executive Officer.

19. Review

- 19.1 The Terms of Reference will be reviewed every four years, or at such other time that Council determines.