

Attachment U



Report on Community Workshops



***Sustaining Our City* Workshop Outcomes Report**

Summary

In October 2013 Straight Talk was appointed by Randwick City Council (Council) to facilitate and report on two community workshops as part of a broader consultation process being undertaken to get community feedback about the environmental levy.

The majority of workshop participants supported the continuation of the levy. However, they provided strong feedback that Council needed to:

- **Be more accountable and demonstrate transparency in terms of how the levy funds are spent**
- **Communicate more actively to increase community awareness of the environmental projects and programs funded through the levy.**

The projects and programs identified as being the highest priority relate to:

- **Energy saving**
- **Water conservation**
- **Community activities and education.**

This report has been prepared by Straight Talk to document the outcomes of the community workshops.

Background

In 2004 Council introduced a special environmental levy to fund a range of environmental projects and programs under the *Sustaining Our City* initiative. The levy is based on six percent of rates collected and provides dedicated resources in terms of staff and funding to be spent on specific sustainability projects and programs to improve the environment.

The levy was initially introduced for a five year period in 2004 and was re-approved in 2009 for a further five year period. Council is undertaking consultation to get community feedback on whether it should apply to the Independent Regulatory and Pricing Tribunal to continue the six percent environmental levy for a further five years from mid-2014. This would cost ratepayers approximately 23 cents / day and is expected to raise approximately \$4M / year for sustainability initiatives.

The current levy has enabled Council to attract an additional \$1 million in external matching grants each year over the past five years and has generated in order of \$1.5M in savings on water costs.

Consultation includes a reply-paid survey sent to all ratepayers in the local government area (LGA), two workshops with randomly selected participants and a random telephone survey.

Workshop purpose and structure

Objectives

The workshops were held in order to give Council the opportunity to provide information to a small sample of the community and get more considered and informed feedback than that being received through the surveys.

The objectives of the workshops were to:

- Understand level of concern and interest in the environment
- Gauge existing awareness of environmental levy and the projects it funds
- Educate participants about the projects/programs funded by the levy and the range of funding options
- Identify participant priorities for future projects/programs
- Identify the level of support for the continuation of the environmental levy.

Participation

Taverner Research randomly called 1,390 ratepayers to identify 46 people to attend the workshops. Taverner identified participants who were broadly representative of the demographic profile of the Randwick LGA in terms of age and gender and geography (northern, middle, southern suburbs) and to ensure a cross section of views in terms of environmental awareness and interest and attitude to the levy being extended.

For a number of reasons, younger people were underrepresented. This was partly because the selection process targeted ratepayers and many younger people have not yet entered the housing market. It was also because younger people are generally less engaged in public issues and do not have the same level of interest or time as older people.

In order to encourage people with both high and low levels of interest in the environment to participate, an \$80 incentive was offered to people to attend a workshop. Despite this incentive, many people with a low level of interest in the environment did not agree to participate. Taverner Research made additional calls in an effort to recruit participants without an active interest in the environment, but very few agreed to participate. Accordingly, people with a low level of environmental awareness were also underrepresented.

In total 37 people participated in the workshops with an 80 percent attendance rate.

Logistics

The workshops were held as follows:

Tuesday 29 October 2013
Between 6-9pm
Vonnie Young Auditorium
Maroubra

Wednesday 30 October 2013
Between 6-9pm
Randwick Community Centre
Randwick

Process

The workshops were designed to enable participants to deliberate and consider the pros and cons of continuing the environmental levy. The process included presentations from Council, small group deliberation and plenary discussion. The process was structured as follows:

- Individual ranking to identify the level of interest and awareness of environmental issues
- Small group discussion to identify awareness of Council's environmental projects and programs
- Technical presentation to provide information on the levy and its associated funding potential and to explain other funding options and the implications of the levy not continuing
- Technical presentation on environmental projects and programs funded by the levy
- Small group discussion to rank the projects/programs in terms of priority
- Rotational small group discussion to explore whether the levy should continue
- Individual completion of the survey (the same survey issued to ratepayers).

Outcomes

Environmental interest

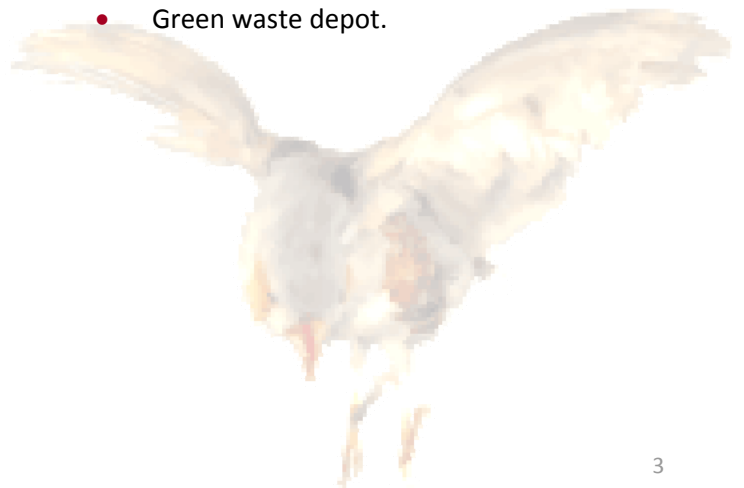
The majority of participants identified a very high or high level of interest in the environment. Ninety three percent (93%) of participants ranked their level of interest as 6 out of 10 or above. Only seven percent (7%) of participants identified their level of interest as 5 or below out of 10.

This highlights that despite significant effort, people with low or no interest in the environment did not attend the workshops.

Awareness of existing environmental projects and programs

Not surprisingly, given that the majority of participants had a high level of interest in the environment, there was significant awareness of the projects and programs that Council delivers. The initiatives with the highest level of awareness included:

- The Coastal Walk upgrade
- Composting and worm farming workshops
- Annual environmental fair / green awareness day
- Waste clean ups, specifically chemical waste (but also electronic waste)
- Bush regeneration and maintenance
- Stormwater harvesting and recycling
- Solar panels installation on Council buildings, such as the Des Renford Aquatic Centre
- Recycling services (yellow and green bins) and recycling promotion, including the Green Money Project
- Tree planting
- Footpath and cycleway construction and maintenance
- Compost and mulch giveaways
- Stormwater trap maintenance
- Beach and park maintenance, including the Clean Beach Challenge
- Environmental and garden education through schools
- Green waste depot.



Participants also identified the following initiatives.

- Randwick community nursery / native plant nursery
- Public compost bins
- Environmental education through libraries and Council’s website
- Collaboration with other councils through the Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils
- Organic bio-cooperative support
- Tree giveaways
- Tree lopping
- Waste management, including garbage pickup in areas with lots of tourists
- School zone conversion of lights to solar
- Stormwater drain, pit and sump maintenance
- School water tank and garden bed installation
- Maroubra Beach outdoor gym maintenance
- Protection of fragile ecosystems through access control.

Priority environmental projects and programs

Across the workshops there was general consensus that the highest priority environmental projects related to **water saving, energy conservation, and community activities and education.**

The table below indicates the priority of environmental projects identified in the workshops and the commentary provided to justify the priority level.

Priority	Commentary
1 Energy saving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus should be to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Encourage and support solar energy with a focus on homes e.g. solar panels on top of unit blocks > Promote individual responsibility for saving energy – 129,000 participants > Encourage wind turbine energy • Reducing energy usage across government buildings saves money for ratepayers and uses less unsustainable fossil fuels • Reducing energy saves emissions and reduces global warming • Investing in energy infrastructure has cost saving potential and will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Reduce the ever increasing expense of buying electricity – future costs will be limited to maintenance costs > Deliver financial and environmental benefits at same time
2 Water conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water is a precious resource – the most vital commodity • Australia is a dry county – there is a need to conserve water: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > To handle droughts and climate change > For the future • Focus should be to:

Priority	Commentary
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Utilise stormwater as a resource > Provide water tanks - run a competition • Investing in water saving infrastructure has cost saving potential and will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Limit future costs to maintenance costs (ongoing infrastructure maintenance is important) > Deliver financial and environmental benefits at same time
<p>3 Community activities and education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Educate / teach younger generation about sustainability for maximum long term benefit > Educate the community to respect the environment > Empower community with information so sustainability can be community driven > Increase awareness of what environmental initiatives are available – the more people learn, the more they come on board • Focus should be on giving people an incentive to take more interest and be involved in saving the environment
<p>4 Biodiversity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think global, act local • Biodiversity keeps the environment in balance • Focus should be to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Protect local plant and animal species for future generations (e.g. bees) > Publicise green spaces but ensure people do not displace plant and animal species
<p>5 Sustainable transport</p>	<p>Focus should be to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Deliver light rail or train (extend to La Perouse) > Ensure safety of sustainable transport > Build bike paths (not electric cars) > Extending bike paths to serve new development south of Kingsford <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important to encourage exercise
<p>6 Community and school food gardens</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus should be to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Encourage and support verge gardens - get Costa from Gardening Australia > Reduce total food wastage by encouraging local harvesting • Important to teach next generation how to feed themselves • Concerned that there is not a lot of output for amount of effort put in

Priority	Commentary
7 Extending the Coastal Walkway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nice for visitors Relates to biodiversity The pathway exists and has less maintenance costs than other infrastructure

Other priorities identified by workshop participants included:

- Maintaining street trees – water new plantings on nature strips (e.g. along Bunnerong Road), trim trees that block streetlights and create safety hazards
- Waste management – manage dumping in public areas, improve recycling schemes in unit buildings by involving residents more and displaying information in different languages
- Coastal protection - maintain marine life and limit erosion
- Adopt sustainability principles in capital works (e.g. use of recycled materials)
- Clear dead trees and bushland – manage fire hazards and clear unsightly dead trees.



Workshop participants discussing environmental priorities and deliberating on whether the environmental levy should be continued



Continuation of environment levy

There was overwhelming support from workshop participants for the levy to be continued. From analysis of individual surveys completed at the end of the workshops:

- 75% of workshop participants supported the environment levy
- 8% of participants indicated did not support the levy
- 17% of participants were unsure whether the levy should continue. The uncertainty was based on the need for more transparency to provide assurances that funds were being spent efficiently.

The primary reasons offered for continuation of the levy included recognition that the levy:

- Helps to improve and sustain the environment
- Enables Council to attract matching grant funding to fast track delivery of environmental projects.

Participants who supported the levy:

- Valued living in a clean, green and sustainable area
- Recognised the achievements that have been delivered via the environmental levy and felt they had benefited directly
- Wanted to ensure certainty of funding for ongoing environmental programs and projects
- Recognised that population growth was having an increasing environmental impact and felt that therefore the levy was ever more important
- Identified a desire to be part of the solution, not part of the problem
- Were of the view that you get what you pay for and that if people were not prepared to pay the levy then the environment would suffer
- Felt the area was relatively affluent and could therefore afford to support environmental projects
- Suggested the levy represented an investment in the future and that it would be cheaper to act now than pay more in the future.

Participants who did not support the levy:

- Wanted to save money on rates
- Felt that projects and programs should be funded out of general rate revenue
- Were of the view that the programs and projects were unnecessary or irrelevant and did not want to fund projects they did not support
- Did not see any visibility of the levy in their area (e.g. Kingsford)
- Did not feel the levy had benefited them directly
- Felt residents were being coerced to accept the levy and that it should be voluntary
- Believed the federal government should fund sustainability initiatives not local government
- Did not like paying multiple levies and saw the environmental levy as additional to the building levy and were of the view that Council was rapacious
- Identified that they already pay the carbon tax to protect the environment.

Participants who were unsure about the continuation of the levy wanted assurance that the funding was

being spent efficiently and / or did not feel the projects benefited them directly.

Use of savings

There were mixed views about the use of funds saved from the generation of energy and water saving initiatives. Participants suggested that Council should:

- Redirect funds back into environmental projects
- Direct funds into community projects
- Direct funds towards reduction of rates.

The general view was that savings should not simply be absorbed back into general revenue.

More transparency and accountability

Participants supported the fact that levy funds remain separated from consolidated revenue. However, they identified potential for wasteful expenditure and over staffing. There was strong support for Council to demonstrate it was being honest with the funds and using them efficiently. Participants requested Council demonstrate more transparency and accountability in terms of expenditure of the levy.

There was a call for:

- Information about:
 - > How much of the levy funds are allocated to overheads – administration and staffing
 - > The potential of projects/programs to become financially self sustainable
 - > How much levy funds are needed for ongoing maintenance of green infrastructure
 - > How and where the levy funds are spent
- Demonstration that funding is equitably spent to benefit ratepayers (i.e. not just those living in coastal suburbs and not tourists)
- Better reporting.

Participants indicated that the levy needed to be reviewed closely to monitor expenditure and outcomes as the environment changes. The general view was that Council should be honest with expenditure - less staff, more action, put savings back into projects.

Improve communication

There was a strong call from participants for Council to improve communication and reporting so that residents understand what projects are being funded by the levy. Suggestions included:

- More advertising on projects – use Facebook and Twitter and smart phone apps to increase awareness especially among younger residents
- Use the homepage of Council's website.

Allocation of funds

There was a call for more consultation with residents regarding priority environmental projects. The view was that ratepayers should have more choice about which projects they support to be funded by the levy.

Keep costs reasonable

A number of participants indicated that they supported the continuation of the levy as long as it remains at a "reasonable" cost, which was suggested to be between under \$100 - \$150 per household/year. Some participants felt that on a cost basis the current levy was very reasonable.

Cap in dollar terms

Some participants suggested the levy should be a capped annual dollar contribution per household and not a percentage of rates. They were of the view that if funds are levied on a percentage basis that the amount of the levy would increase automatically as rates increase annually to reflect consumer price index adjustments.

Some participants also noted that with new development there would be more rateable properties and that the amount of funding generated by the levy would increase accordingly if it was accrued on a percentage basis. They noted the projections for the levy need to transparently reflect the funding potential associated with new development.

Voluntary not compulsory

Some participants suggested the levy should be voluntary.

Non ratepayers benefit

There was recognition that the environmental amenity of the area encourages tourists, but that they create rubbish (such as takeaway food containers and dumped furniture) which ratepayers have to pay to clean up. There was some resentment to the fact that residents pay rates to benefit non-ratepayers.

There was a suggestion to empower rangers and lifeguards to fine people who pollute (i.e. tourists).

Individual views

As noted above three quarters of workshop participants (75%) supported the continuation of the levy. Less than a tenth of participants (8%) opposed the levy and approximately a fifth of participants (17%) were unsure about whether the levy should continue and needed more information about the way funds were spent.

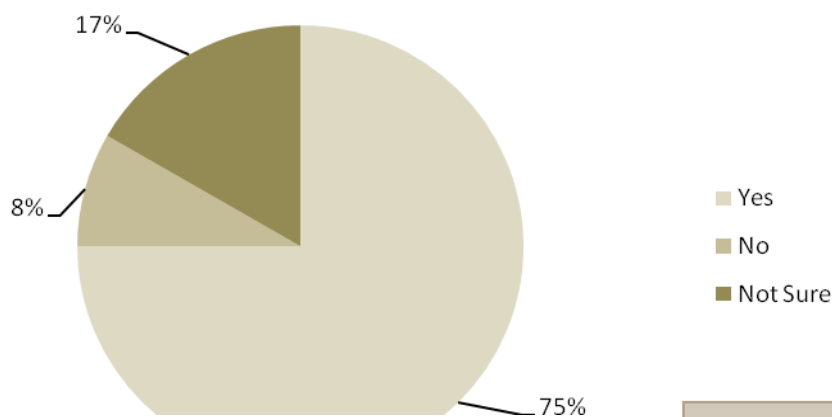
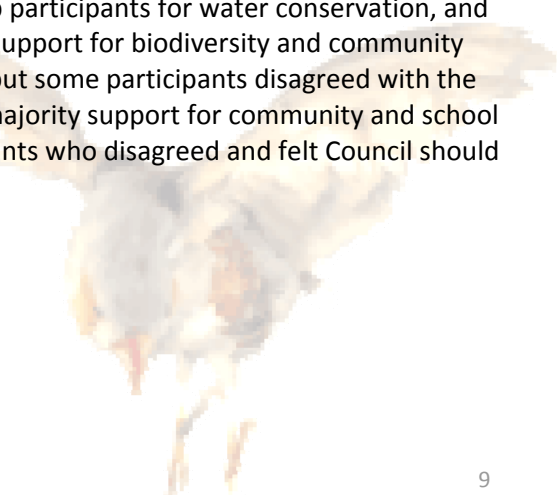


Chart: Level of support for continuation of environment levy

In terms of priorities, there was most support from workshop participants for water conservation, and energy saving projects and programs. There was also strong support for biodiversity and community activities and education projects and programs to continue, but some participants disagreed with the continuation of these initiatives. Similarly, while there was majority support for community and school gardens and the Coastal Walkway, there were some participants who disagreed and felt Council should stop delivering these initiatives.



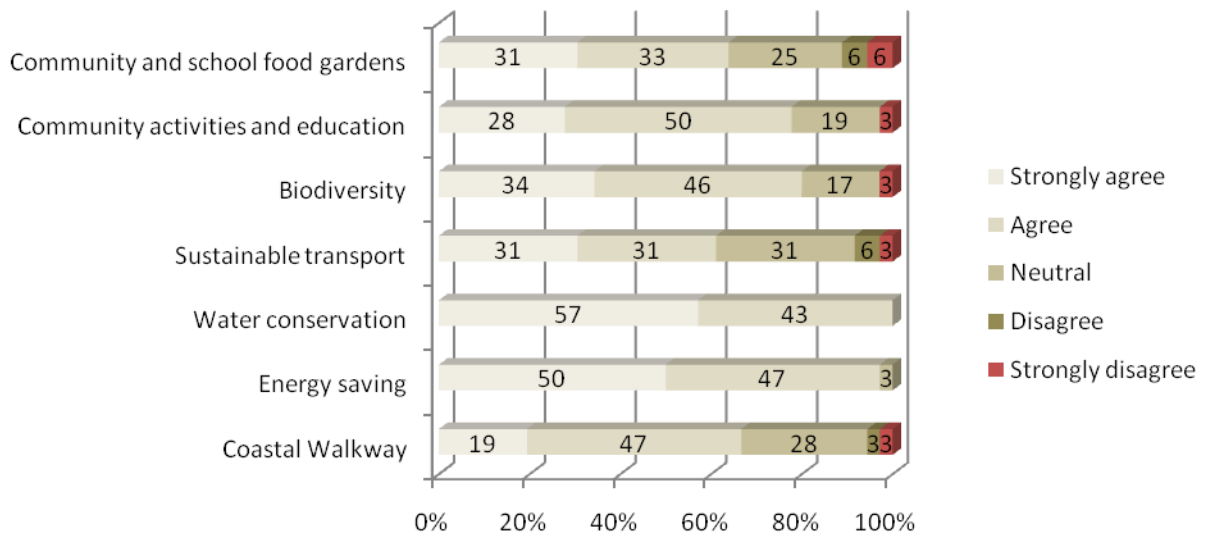


Chart: Level of agreement for continuation of specific environmental projects

Given that nearly all workshop participants had a high level of environmental interest and awareness it is not surprising that they supported the continuation of the levy and associated environmental projects and programs.

Conclusion

The workshops provided clear indication from people with a high level of environmental interest and awareness that Council should seek approval to extend the levy in order to continue delivering environmental programs. In saying this, workshop participants wanted to hold Council to account and identified the need for more transparent reporting about the way levy funds are spent and proactive communication about environmental initiatives being delivered with the levy.

Despite major efforts to identify people with a low level of concern for the environment, the workshops were underrepresented by people with a low level of environmental awareness. Accordingly, the workshops did not provide Council with any real insight into the views of people who are not actively interested in the environment. As such, it will be important to consider the workshop outcomes alongside the results of the other consultation activities being undertaken to get community feedback on the environmental levy.

