

BENALLA

RURAL CITY COUNCIL

BENALLA RURAL CITY COUNCIL

CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY

2024-2029

Contents

Acknowledgement of Country	3
Message from the Mayor.....	3
Executive Summary	3
Introduction to the Strategy.....	4
About Benalla Rural City Council.....	5
Traditional Owners.....	7
Community Vision	7
Internal and Strategic Context.....	8
Alignment with the <i>Council Plan 2021-2025</i>	9
United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals.....	10
Environment Strategy Achievements	11
Environmental Context	12
Landscape.....	13
Waterways.....	13
Bioregions.....	13
Flora and Fauna.....	15
Climate Change Context	16
Key Areas.....	16
Key Focus Area 1: Net Zero	17
Case Study: EV Chargers and Council fleet.....	20
Key Focus Area 2: Increase Biodiversity.....	21
Case Study: Hollands Bio Link Channel	23
Key Focus Area 3: Circular Economy	23
Case Study: Clothes swap and textile recycling	26
Key Focus Area 4: Water Sensitive Communities	26
Case Study: Cabomba in Lake Benalla	28
Key Focus Area 5: Sustainable Communities.....	29
Case Study: Benalla Grow Your Own – Benalla Health	31
Action Plan:.....	32
References	35

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and to Elders from any other communities.

Message from the Mayor

I am pleased to present Benalla Rural City Council's first *Climate and Environment Strategy 2024-2029* — a pivotal document that charts our course towards a more sustainable and resilient future. This strategy is a testament to our commitment to environmental stewardship.

The Council takes pride in our commitment to achieving net zero for corporate operations, enhancing biodiversity, and progressing towards a circular economy. Furthermore, our dedication to developing a water-sensitive community, fostering sustainability, and promoting inclusion reflects our collective vision for a resilient and harmonious community.

As part of our commitment, to deliver this strategy the Council will actively participate in regional partnerships, networks, committees, and groups focused on vegetation planning, land and biodiversity planning, waterway management, training, education, and community engagement.

I express my gratitude to the community members and stakeholders who have contributed their insights and feedback in shaping this Strategy. Your involvement has been invaluable and we are confident that, together, we can build a more sustainable, resilient, and inclusive Benalla Rural City.

Let us embark on this journey towards a greener and more sustainable future, hand in hand.

Executive Summary

The Benalla Rural City Council's *Climate and Environment Strategy 2024-2029* is a comprehensive strategy designed to address the environmental challenges and opportunities the area will face in the coming decades.

This Strategy was developed in consultation with the community of Benalla, agencies, stakeholders, and Council staff. The strategy is guided by extensive community consultation and feedback and aims to align with the Council Plan and the Community Plan, including the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and the wider goals of sustainability and climate resilience.

The first section of this Strategy details Benalla Rural City's environmental context, internal and strategic context, briefly discusses climate change in Victoria and the region specific to Benalla. It then identifies six key focus areas and delves deeper into Council's vision and commitment to each: achieving net zero for corporate operations, increasing biodiversity across the municipality, advancing towards a circular economy, developing a water-sensitive community, fostering a sustainable community, and promoting inclusion with the local Aboriginal Advisory Group. These focus areas were chosen as the most impactful and pressing issues by the community.

This strategy aims at achieving our community vision which is to: regenerate biodiversity in natural environment and green spaces, reach zero carbon emissions, create a circular economy, have an active and sustainable transport network, support sustainable food systems and have water sensitive places and communities. It sets a clear direction for the next five years, aiming to make Benalla Rural City a more resilient, sustainable, and inclusive community.

Introduction to the Strategy

This Climate and Environment Strategy (the Strategy) has been developed by Benalla Rural City Council (BRCC) as part of our role in protecting our environment and safeguarding its ability to support our community into the future.

To achieve this goal, the Strategy outlines a proactive and strategic approach to environmental matters and identifies priorities for management. In adopting this Climate and Environment Strategy, Council aims to respond to environmental concerns held by the community.

BRCC is involved in a number of regional partnerships, networks, committees and groups that aim to address environmental issues, responsibilities, deliver projects and meet environmental objectives that require a collaborative approach.

These groups focus on vegetation planning and retention controls, land and biodiversity planning, roadside and waterway management, training, education and skills development, and community engagement.

The many achievements to date are testament to the collaborative approach fostered within our region. Involvement in these groups has given the Council the opportunity to undertake activities that otherwise may not have been possible.

The Climate and Environment Strategy is a high-level Council strategic document, that identifies a number of key areas and actions that we plan to undertake over the next five years to meet the objectives of the Council Plan.

The Strategy has been developed using feedback and insights from community members and various stakeholders throughout the municipality.

About Benalla Rural City Council

Benalla Rural City is located in north-eastern Victoria, 193 kilometres north-east of the Melbourne CBD, and is centred in the Broken River valley. The population according to the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data from the 2021 census is 14,528, with approximately 9,000 living in urban areas and the remaining in and around the Benalla town.¹ The total land area is 2,352 square kilometres.

Benalla Rural City was established as an agricultural and pastoral district in the 1840s. The rural area was characterised by wheat, oats and potato growing, alongside some vineyards and mining. It was proclaimed a city in 1965 and Lake Benalla was artificially created in 1973.

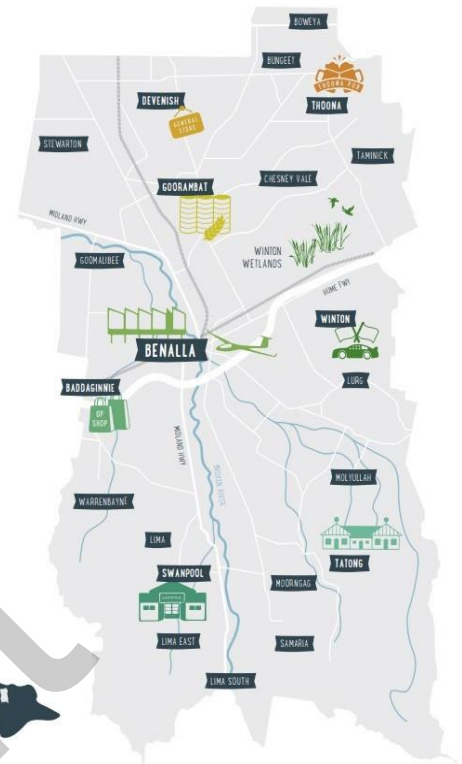
The communities south of the freeway that make up the LGA include those of Acherton, Baddaginnie, Boho South, Glenrowan West, Lima, Lima South, Lurg, Molyullah, Moorngag, Samaria, Swanpool, Tatong, Upper Lurg, Upper Ryan's Creek, Warrenbayne and Winton. The communities north of the freeway include Boweya, Boxwood, Broken Creek, Bungeet, Chesney Vale, Devenish, Goomalibee, Goorambat, Stewarton, Taminick, Tarnook and Thoona.

The area's economic sectors reflect Benalla's role as a regional centre: agricultural production, tourism and manufacturing. It is dominated by employment in the manufacturing, retail trade, health and community services sectors.

The proportion of people employed in agriculture is above the state average. The rural areas of the municipality are recognised for their quality soils and many areas have access to good irrigation.

The major agricultural industries are prime lamb and beef production, some dairying and broad acre cropping. Recent agricultural diversification has seen a rise in viticulture, more intensive forms of horticulture and forestry.

Benalla Rural City



¹ Retrieved from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA21010>

The main tourism attractions include, but are not limited to, the Winton Motor Raceway, Winton Wetlands, State Gliding Centre (Benalla Airport), Benalla Gardens and Showgrounds, Aboriginal Gardens and the Benalla Art Gallery.



Figure 1: Winton Wetlands

Benalla Rural City offers a lifestyle that has a choice of primary and secondary schools, a TAFE college, comprehensive health services and a wealth of participation opportunities including theatre, sport, music, wine and art. Lake Benalla, with the surrounding Botanical Gardens and walking track, is a key attraction located within the town. Benalla Rural City has well developed disability, aged care and childcare services.

Traditional Owners

Benalla Rural City Council has recently submitted their first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) to demonstrate our commitment to reconciliation and to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we operate. We recognise the importance of building respectful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and promoting equality, inclusivity, and diversity within our organisation and the broader community.

Benalla Rural City was traditionally a meeting point for three distinct mobs, Yorta Yorta, Taungurung and Pangerang. They are the traditional custodians of this land, and Benalla Rural City Council recognises the importance of connection to Country and pay our respects to their elders past and present.

Promoting inclusion with the Benalla Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group within Council operations will help strengthen this tie, as the First Nations peoples of this land have deep connections and commitments to the community which they represent. By working in partnership, Benalla Rural City and the Benalla Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group can improve upon:

- employment and economic development
- health and wellbeing
- recognition and respect for individuals and communities
- civic participation.
- planning
- environmental protection
- reconciliation
- service delivery and access for Aboriginal people
- governance
- land management
- protection of homelands and cultural heritage.

We are thankful for the knowledge and insight that Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have contributed to this Strategy.

Community Vision

This strategy was developed in consultation with the community. Council staff made available multiple and varied avenues for the community to share their ideas and provide input. These opportunities included:

- Online survey on Council's Hive page.
- Four workshops at Baddaginnie, Swanpool, Goorambat and Benalla.
- Workshop held with the Full Impact Squad- a youth group supported by the Tomorrow Today Foundation.
- Workshop was also held with several members of the local Aboriginal Advisory Committee.



**BENALLA RURAL CITY
COMMUNITY PLAN**
2016 - 2036

From this, Council staff received 61 submissions from the online survey and the workshops were well received with 90-100 attendees across all four workshops. The feedback provided invaluable information for the Environment team to structure this strategy and it also provided a welcoming and engaging conversation between Councillors, community members and Council staff.

Throughout this process Council sought input on five key focus areas. The most common and considered as significant input by the community were:

- net zero
- biodiversity and regeneration
- circular economy
- water sensitive communities
- sustainable communities.

Across the engagement there were several recurring themes and suggested actions. These included:

- Council to set a net zero target and acknowledge the climate is in a state of emergency.
- Transition Council's fleet to low carbon vehicles.
- Increase canopy cover.
- Increase biodiversity values across the municipality through direct intervention and community driven projects.
- Minimise the removal of existing vegetation.
- Increase protection and care for roadside vegetation.
- Increase education and awareness on all areas of waste and a circular economy.

Internal and Strategic Context

The Strategy is an extension of the Council's values and principles which will help shape Benalla Rural City as a leading partner in providing a healthier and cleaner environment for the Benalla community. As stated in the previous Environment Strategy, the Council will employee principles that accompany the Strategy, which will enhance the ability of Council to achieve its stated vision, goals and objectives outlined in this document. These same principles apply to this new Climate and Environment Strategy.

Council (as an organisation) will facilitate:

- **Participation:** Early and honest engagement with the community around significant actions and will participate in environmentally sustainable activities where appropriate.
- **Working together:** Development and maintenance of relationships to achieve our goals – includes using local service providers where possible.
- **Justifiable:** All works will consider the environmental impact and will be subject to Council risk assessment mechanisms and legislative requirements. This includes an environmental, social, cultural and economic analysis where appropriate (i.e. for projects likely to have significant impacts or costs).
- **Empowerment:** Education and information will be designed to support individuals to take action in their own way.
- **Respect:** Council will respect different views and ideas, try to accommodate them where possible, and provide a reasonable explanation where it's not possible.
- **Accountability:** Council will be accountable for the actions it delivers and the immediate outcomes that are expected to be attained.
- **Continuous improvement:** Council will show leadership in environmental sustainability, monitor its progress, report to the community, and involve the community in planning for improvement.

Councillors, staff, contractors and consultants will:

- Ensure that activities are conducted in accordance with this policy.
- Follow all departmental environmental procedures, signage and guidance.
- Foster a culture of environmental responsibility at work by reducing consumption of resources.
- Complying with environmental regulations.
- Reuse and recycle resources, where possible, to minimise waste-to-landfill and further reduce our impact on the environment.
- Limit our greenhouse gas emissions by minimising energy use in our offices and operations and making environmentally responsible travel decisions.
- Respect all natural and cultural heritage areas - threatened species and communities, historical, cultural and Indigenous heritage and areas of high conservation value.

Alignment with the *Council Plan 2021-2025*

The Benalla Rural City *Council Plan 2021-2025* is a guiding document that sets short- to long-term goals for Council and the community to work towards creating a vision for the future of Benalla Rural City. The Climate and Environment Strategy sits within the medium-term objectives of the Council Plan.

Collaboration with the community established five themes as the framework for the key objectives and strategies within the Council Plan. Each of these themes has a short-term objective to develop an action plan that will be reported on annually, with achievements and performance against key success measures communicated to the community.

This action plan can be found at the end of this document outlining the timelines for each action within the key focus areas demonstrating accountability for Council to meet its short-term objectives.

The key focus areas of the Climate and Environment Strategy are linked to these themes through actions that will help Council realise their goals and objectives. These themes are:



United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals

In 2015 the UN set 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to provide a blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. The target to achieve these goals was set for 2030.

This is a call to the 193 countries who committed to the target to recognise that ending poverty goes hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality and encourage economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.²



Figure 2: United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Australia is one of the 193 countries which have committed to the goals. It will require all stakeholders, state governments, LGAs and businesses to take action for Australia to meet the 2030 target.

To show Benalla's commitment to the SDGs, each key focus area has been linked to the relevant SDGs.

² Retrieved from the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

Environment Strategy Achievements

This is the third Climate and Environment Strategy that Council has developed in consultation with numerous stakeholders to deliver key actions to help Benalla Rural City tackle climate change.

The last strategy listed several key achievements that had been implemented since the last strategy was developed.

The actions that Benalla Rural City set out in the last Strategy that have been implemented are below:

- Developed a *Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2013-2025*.
- The RecLess: Less Water, Less Often, More Resilient Open Spaces Project. Partnership with Alpine Shire Council.
- The Goulburn Broken Greenhouse Alliance 'Watts Working Better' project was launched in 2014 to improve the efficiency of residential street lights across Benalla Rural City Council.
- Energy efficiency upgrades and solar PV at five Council buildings in 2018 and 2019.
- Net Zero Action plan developed in 2024.
- Working alongside the Goulburn Murray Catchment Authority (GMCA) on regional projects such as; Naturally Cooler Towns and Resilient Public Estate.

In addition to these key strategies developed the following actions have also been implemented:

- Tree planting day.
- Community environmental education programs such as clean up Australia Day.
- Key partnerships with other environmental agencies.
- Material recycling at the Resource Recovery Centre.
- Efficiency upgrades in Council buildings.
- Procurement of carbon accounting software to track its corporate emissions.
- Two electric vehicles to Councils fleet.

Environmental Context

Benalla Rural City has a diverse and varied landscape, with beautiful state and federal parks, numerous waterways and native plant and animal species. Council has implemented projects that have contributed to reducing carbon emissions that have an impact on the Benalla environment.

Our environmental context in numbers:

Insert Gaphic to show figures.

- **2472km** of managed road reserves.
- **155ha** of managed bush reserves.
- **1500** native plants planted on average per year.
- **1794** tonnes of FOGO diverted from landfill.
- **1809** native flora and fauna species of which **144** are threatened under the FFA and EPBC.
- **1277** of trees planted since the inception of the Street Tree Planting Program.
- **20** tonnes of donated textiles through the Textile Recycling Program since 2022.
- **120kW** of solar installed across five Council facilities, supplying **18 per cent** of Council annual electricity.
- **Nine per cent** of Council emissions come from electricity.
- **Four** hybrid and **two** electric vehicles in Council's light vehicle fleet.
- **Two** Council used electric vehicle charging station and **three** electric vehicle charging stations for public use.

Landscape

Benalla's central location in regional Victoria is divided by the Hume Freeway with hills, valleys, grazing land and forests to the south and plains and rolling hills used as cropping and grazing land to the north. The south, east and north-east landscape retains a greater native vegetation cover whilst land to the north-west and west supports dry land and irrigated cropping.

Situated around Lake Benalla, which is a significant natural feature of local and regional importance, Benalla has four major reserve areas; Mount Samaria State Park, Warby-Ovens National Park, Reef Hills State Park and the Winton Wetlands, these state parks comprise of roughly five per cent of the land area. It is a predominately rural area, with the majority of the land used for agricultural purposes, including wool and meat production, dairying and crop farming, followed by parkland and residential land.

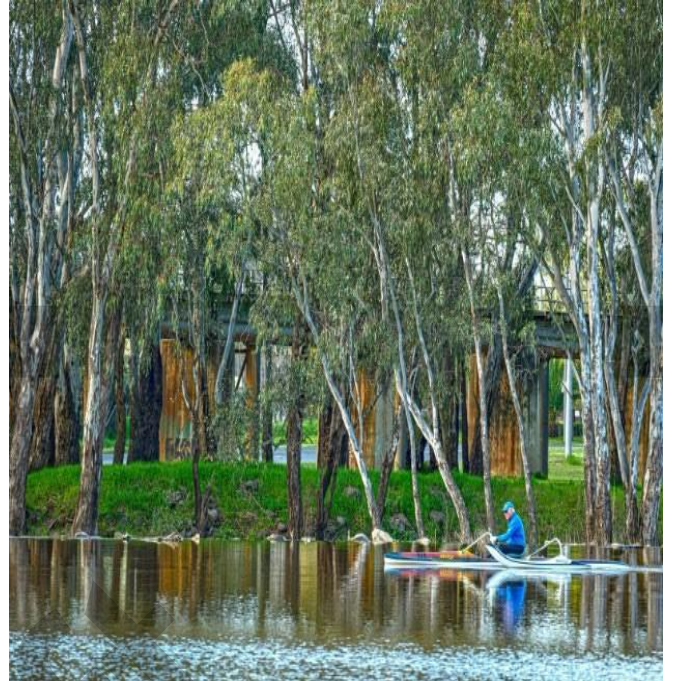


Figure 3: Lake Benalla

Thirty per cent of Benalla land is for public use, with three national parks comprising of 8,730 ha or 3.7 per cent of the total 235,264 ha of land (2,350 square kilometres). It sits within the Ovens Murray Region which borders the Murray River to the north, with access to Victoria's High Country.

Waterways

Benalla Rural City contains a number of tributaries of the Broken River and a significant portion of the Broken River itself, which is regulated by Lake Nillahcootie, to its southern border. The Broken River is a tributary of the Goulburn River, which flows into the Murray River.

The Broken Creek is also a significant system in the area that flows out of the Broken River and joins directly with the Murray upstream of the Goulburn River, making it a part of the Murray Basin.

Benalla's water is sourced from the Ryans and Whiskey Creeks, which fills the McCall Say Reservoir and the Loombah Reservoir. These reservoirs have a combined capacity of 1,747 megalitres, of which Benalla typically uses 1,400 megalitres each year.

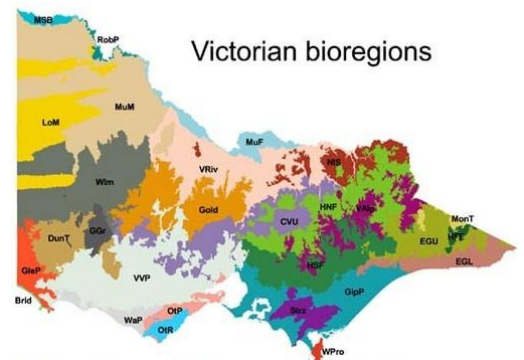
Bioregions

Biogeographical Regionalisation for Australia (IBRA) is a national planning framework and tool for identifying reservation targets, defining terrestrial habitats and ecoregions, and vegetation community and land system mapping to be used to identify regional ecosystems across Australia.³

³ Retrieved from Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/land/nrs/science/ibra/australias-bioregion-framework>

It classifies the environment using a range of attributes such as climate, geomorphology, geology, soils and vegetation. In Victoria there are 28 bioregions. Of those, four bioregions make up the landscape within Benalla's borders, which are:⁴

- Central Victorian Uplands (CVU)
- Highlands - Northern Fall (HNF)
- Victorian Riverina (VRiv)
- Northern Inland Slopes (NIS).



The CVU region, located in central Victoria, is dominated by Lower Paleozoic deposits (granitic and sedimentary terrain, old volcanic rock). The vegetation is made up of Grassy Dry Forest, Healthy Dry Forest, Herb-rich Foothill Forest and Shrubby Foothill Forest ecosystems.

The HNF region, located in the central part of East Victoria, is the northerly aspect of the Great Dividing Range. With moderate to steep slopes, high plateaus and alluvial flats, the geology is Palaeozoic deposits (sedimentary and granitic rocks). The vegetation is Herb-rich Foothill Forest, Shrubby Dry, Montane Dry Woodland, Heathy Dry Forest, Grassy Forest and Valley Grassy Forest ecosystems with major river valleys.

The VRiv, located north of the Great Dividing Range, is a flat to gently undulating landscape with evidence of former stream channels and wide floodplain areas associated with major river systems and prior streams. It's part of the Cainozoic period which dominates the Riverine Plain.

The vegetation is predominately Plain Grassy Woodland, Plains Grassland, Pine Box Woodland/Riverina Plain Grassy Woodland Mosaic, Riverine Grassy Woodland/Riverine Sedgy Forest/Wetland Mosaic, Plains Grassy Woodland/Gilgai Plains Woodland/Wetland Mosaic, Grassy Woodland and Wetland Formation ecosystems. It is associated with eight river basin tributaries of the Murray River.

The last bioregion is NIS, located in the northeast of Victoria, with foothill slopes and minor ranges separated by river valleys which drain from the High Country to the Murray River.

The vegetation is dominated by Grassy Dry Forest, Box Ironbark Forest, Granitic Hills Woodland, Heathy Dry Forest and, Shrubby Dry Forest ecosystems on the less fertile hills; Herb-rich Foothill Forest ecosystems on the more fertile hills and outwash; and Grassy Woodland, Valley Grassy Forest, Plains Grassy Woodland, Floodplain Riparian Woodland, Riverine Grassy Woodland, Riverine Sedgy Forest and Wetland ecosystems on the fertile plains and watercourses.

⁴ Retrieved from the Victorian State Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, <https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/biodiversity/bioregions-and-evc-benchmarks>

Flora and Fauna

The Benalla LGA is home to a number of rare and endangered species listed under the *Fauna and Flora Guarantee Act 1988* (FFG Act). Rare and endangered native fauna such as, Squirrel gliders, brush-tailed phascogales (Tuan) and bush stone curlews are all found within the Benalla Rural City municipality.

It's also home to species listed as endangered and critically endangered under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

This includes the Critically endangered Regent Honeyeater *Anthochaera Phrygia*, which is primarily a canopy bird and is reliant on select eucalypt and mistletoe species, including Mugga Ironbark, *Eucalyptus sideroxylon* and Yellow Box, *Eucalyptus melliodora*.



Figure 4: Grey-crowned Babbler

The Benalla Planning Scheme seeks to protect and stop the removal of native vegetation that support Regent honeyeater (Clause 42.02 Schedule 3). The Vegetation Protection Overlay (VPO) covers a large area of important vegetation for the Regent Honeyeater in the East side of the municipality.

Another endangered species supported by the Benalla Planning Scheme is the Grey-crowned Babbler (Clause 42.02 Schedule 2). The Grey-crowned Babbler's preferred habitat is significantly fragmented and why a VPO on the west side of the municipality is so important.

Protecting vegetation in key habitat areas such as Grey Box Grassy Woodland is crucial for the species.

The Lima stringybark *Eucalyptus alligatrix* subspecies *limaensis*, which is endemic to a small area near Swanpool and listed as endangered under the EPBC Act. It is confined to a very small area and highly fragmented with higher-than-normal level of risk to common threats. Continued protection of existing mature trees and allowing for juvenile recruitment is required.

One of only a small number of remnant populations of Macquarie Perch exists within the Broken River and Hollands creek systems within Benalla Rural City. Macquarie Perch are also listed as endangered under the EPBC Act and FFG Act, after a long-term decline in abundance and a reduction in self-sustaining populations.

Climate Change Context

Victoria's climate has changed over the years due to changing weather systems, seasonal influences and large-scale climate drivers.

The state is becoming hotter and overall drier with extreme weather events shaping how Victorians must adapt. According to the Victorian Climate Science Report 2019, Victoria has experienced a temperature increase of over 1°C from 1910 to 2018, double the number of days over 35°C, a longer and more intense fire season and more days of heavy rain.⁵ All of this is expected to continue to increase in the future if nothing is done to combat climate related disasters.

The area in which Benalla Rural City resides is in the Ovens Murray region. This region is also impacted by these extremes, with projections that indicate median maximum temperature rises of 1.4°C by the decade between 2030-2040 and 2.4°C by mid-century under high emission scenarios.⁶

This is expected to result in more extreme rainfall events, maximum daily temperature increases, and longer and earlier fires seasons since the mid-1900s. Overall, just like Victoria as a whole, the Ovens Murray regions is expected to become warmer and drier, with these changes largely contingent on future increases in greenhouse gas emissions (GHG).

There are actions that can be taken now to limit these extreme dangers and avoid the worst impacts of climate change. Under a low emissions scenario, Victoria's average temperature increase could be less significant and by 2050 the state's temperature rise could be kept to below 1.5°C and 1.6°C by 2070. To realise this lower temperature, rise scenario action must be taken now.

In recent years Benalla has taken out the number one position for storm hot spot in Victoria by the SES, with flooding incidents for 2022 to 2023 increased by 130 per cent to the previous financial year.

A changing climate poses risks to the key areas within this plan: biodiversity, water resources, sustainable and thriving communities and the economy.

Key Areas

In the table below Council has identified five key areas that will have the most significant gains in delivering this strategy. Each focus area has a vision and actions which Council will prioritise over the next five years.

The actions in each focus area align with the Council Plan on developing short-term action plans that sit within each theme to hold Council and the community accountable to progress in implementing these actions. The action plans will be updated to reflect any progress which has been made (Table 7). The key areas have also been linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

⁵ Retrieved from Victoria's Climate Science Report 2019, <https://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/victorias-changing-climate>

⁶ Retrieved from the Ovens Murray Climate Projections 2019, <https://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/victorias-changing-climate>

Table 1: Five Key Focus Areas

Net Zero
Biodiversity and Regeneration
Circular Economy
Water Sensitive Communities
Sustainable Communities

Key Focus Area 1: Net Zero



Net zero emissions means reducing the world’s greenhouse gas emissions to as close to zero as possible with available technology. This means Australia must rapidly phase out fossil fuels (coal, oil and natural gas) and transition to renewable energy across all sectors of the economy.

Setting an aspirational net zero target is an approach taken by all levels of government. Be it federal, state or local government it establishes leadership and demonstrates commitment to actions based on factors such as available budget, political will or community expectations.

By establishing a net zero target councils can work with actions that are most pressing in reducing their emissions first, while working with key stakeholders and the community to reduce emissions from actions that require more long-term planning and budget.

Given recent instances of extreme temperatures (2023 being the hottest year on record), flooding, and wildfires across the global, the urgency for the Council to take action in reducing emissions and meeting net zero has never been greater. Relying solely on the purchase of carbon offsets is insufficient in the face of these extreme natural disasters.

The Victorian Government has a net zero target of 2045, with 75-80 per cent reduction by 2035. The Australian Government has set a net zero target of 2050, with an interim target of 43 per cent below 2005 levels in 2030.

Other councils around BRCC have set targets between 2030-2050. The Council has recently endorsed a Net Zero Action Plan which has set a net zero target for all corporate emissions excluding waste by 2035/2036 and including waste by 2040/2041. This Action Plan sits under the short-term planning objectives within the Council Plan.

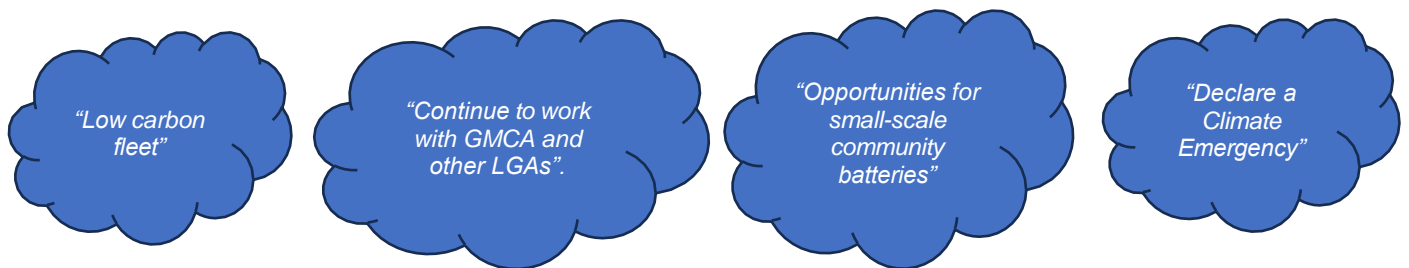


Figure 5: Feedback from community engagement

In response to workshops conducted earlier this year and feedback from the community, Council has set a vision to be net zero by 2040/41. Council has developed a Net Zero Action Plan in 2024 which aligns with this focus area. The actions in that plan have been added to provide continuity between the two documents.

Draft

Table 2: Net Zero Action Plan

Action Plan	Description	Financial year to be completed
Key Focus Area 1- Net Zero	Council to employ an Officer to a minimum of 0.6 FTE position to assist in the delivery of the Strategy and Net Zero Action Plan.	2025/26
	Transition to 100 per cent renewable energy (VECO 2.0).	2024/25
	Transition Council’s passenger vehicle fleet to low carbon vehicles.	2029/30
	Transition Council’s vans to low carbon vehicles.	2026/27
	Transition Council’s utility vehicles to low carbon vehicles.	2032/33
	Review the current Fleet Strategy to include EVs in the replacement cycle.	2024/25
	Audit Council owned buildings to transition to net zero or lower emission buildings and facilities.	Ongoing
	Council to demonstrate leadership in response to Climate Change	Ongoing
	Install solar PV onto all suitable Council owned buildings.	2026/27
	Explore opportunities for a community battery or microgrid.	2025/26
	Ensure changing rainfall, flooding, bushfire and drought patterns are included in all Council strategies and asset management plans where applicable.	Ongoing
	Incorporate the new Climate and Environment Strategy in the review of the planning scheme to help inform our local policy in the planning scheme.	2026/27

Case Study: EV Chargers and Council fleet

There is a continual rise in Electric Vehicles (EVs) on roads and hence a rising need for places to charge them. EVs are becoming more and more popular as the need and want to reduce our emissions quickly grows.

One of the issues that has slowed the rate of EV adoption is the lack of charging infrastructure. Minimal charging infrastructure has been a deterrent for many who are wanting to transition to an EV. As support and demand has increased more charging options have begun to appear and substantially more are on their way.

Benalla Rural City sits an ideal location as the gateway to the North East and Goulburn Murray Regions and for travellers heading up and down the Hume. Furthermore, there is a growing need and want within the local community for EV chargers.

Currently, there are three chargers in the municipality open to the public with a dual charger located in the Denny Street Carpark in Benalla and another provided by Schnieder Electric available during certain times. Council will seek to provide more EV charging options around the municipality moving forward.

There is also a rise in accommodation providers in the municipality offering charging to tenants, providing visitors with the opportunity to charge their vehicles overnight while they stay. It is a fantastic incentive to attract more visitors to the region, and something that will hopefully become more common.

Furthermore, Benalla Rural City has brought its first EV into Council fleet in the last 12 months. This is the start of transition that will see more EVs enter Council fleet, reducing Councils future emissions.

Key Focus Area 2: Increase Biodiversity



Biodiversity defines all life on Earth, it provides basic necessities and essential resources and services to all people.⁷ A study conducted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) found that up to one million of Earth's estimated eight million plant, insect and animal species are at risk of extinction within the next few decades.

Climate change has a major impact on biodiversity in Australia, one that harms Australians' air and water, energy and food, health and well-being and tourism to name a few. A lack of biodiversity affects our natural areas, parks and recreation that provide numerable benefits to society, the economy and the environment. Benalla Rural City Council contains high value flora (plants) and fauna (animals), including roughly 85 different species of fauna that are threatened.

The *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Amendment Act 2019* lists a number of threatening processes to biodiversity. The most significant issues for Benalla Rural City Council are invasive species, climate change and changes to land-use which is harmful to agriculture in the area.

The Victorian Government has enacted a plan to protect its environment through the *Biodiversity 2037 Plan*. This plan outlines ways communities can start planning and regenerating biodiversity loss by:⁸

- Managing threats such as further loss of habitat, weeds and pest animals and inappropriate regimes.
- Increase habitat quality and extent, creating additional habitat areas and connections.
- Enhance biodiversity by directly managing native species through numerous actions.
- Provide suitable habitat for species of conservation importance- both native and non-native.
- Promoting biodiversity benefits in human-centered settings, such as soil conservation practices, carbon sequestration, and stocking waterways with native fish for recreational fishing to name a few.

Benalla's Roadside Vegetation Management Plan recognises that a high priority will be given to retain existing native vegetation, prevent decline of indigenous vegetation communities, enhance priority habitats and improve connectivity. It further states that natural regeneration of indigenous vegetation will be protected and encouraged and a priority for natural regeneration and rehabilitation programs should be roadsides that form strategic biological corridors.

⁷ Retrieved from the Royal Society of Victoria, Towards conservation & Recovery of Victoria's biodiversity.

⁸ Retrieved from Victorian Government, Protecting Victoria's Environment- Biodiversity 2037

There are numerous councils within Victoria that are adopting biodiversity policies and toolkits to address this critical issue. BRCC has recently received a vegetation grant that can be utilised for biodiversity and regenerative projects.

In October the 2023 Street Tree Planting Program was completed, which saw 70 new trees planted in nature strips around Benalla.

The types of trees selected considered factors such as local conditions, climate and the existing streetscape. In addition, the trees planted are known for their resilience to pests and disease.

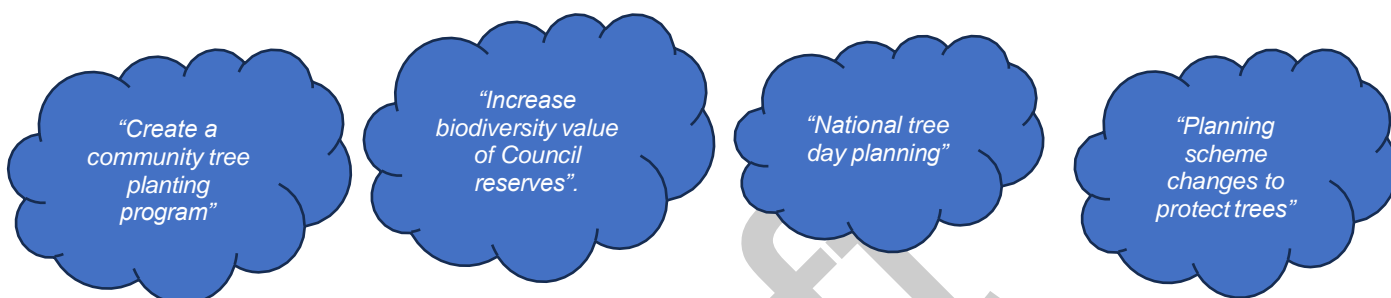


Figure 6: Feedback from community engagement

In response to workshops conducted earlier this year and feedback from the community, Council has set a vision to increase biodiversity across the municipality. In order to achieve this Council has identified the below actions to help progress in this focus area.

Table 3: Biodiversity Action Plan

Action Plan	Description	Financial year to be completed
Key Focus Area 2 – Increase Biodiversity	Council to increase tree planting program to create habitat for fauna and flora.	2024/25
	Council to review the roadside management plan with consideration to pest and weed control program.	2024/25
	Council to partner with other agencies to advocate and protect wildlife.	Ongoing
	Support the Winton Wetlands restoration project where possible.	Ongoing
	Council to continue to work on rehabilitating the Holland Bio Link.	Ongoing
	Council to deliver a New Pest and Weed Control Plan.	2023/24
	Map and register trees of cultural significance on public property.	2024/25
	Mapping of existing tree canopy in the Benalla Rural City.	Ongoing

Case Study: Hollands Bio Link Channel

In November 2014 Benalla Rural City, with the assistance of the Inlet Channel Management Plan Advisory Committee, developed the Holland Bio Link Reserve Management Plan. The Management Plan outlined the strategies and desired outcomes for the reserve that contained the decommissioned Mokoan inlet channel stretching from the Winton Wetlands (formerly Lake Mokoan) to Hollands Creek.

The entire approximately 13km by 110m reserve is classified as ecological vegetation class (EVC) 55 Plains Grassy Woodland. EVC 55 is classified as endangered within the Goulburn Broken Catchment and contains key canopy species such as Grey Box (*Eucalyptus macrocarpa*) and River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*).

The reserve was split into three Zones with works to rehabilitate Zone 1 beginning in 2015. Around 12,000 plants have been planted in Zone 1 since the adoption of the management plan, with plants chosen based on species naturally found in Plains Grassy Woodland areas.

BRCC has been lucky to work with the Regent Honeyeater Project (RHP) throughout the life of the management plan. RHP and their volunteers, have been a major asset to have partnering with Council on this project. Support from the GB CMA has also been an important to the success of the project.

The next steps in this project include assessment and revision the Holland Bio Link Management Plan and beginning works in Zone 2 and 3 to join the corridor with Hollands Creek.

Key Focus Area 3: Circular Economy



A circular economy is centred on the idea of resources being kept as long as possible within the economic system, where materials that have undergone an entire lifecycle, from product to the end stage, are returned to that same system. It focuses on not only finding ways to keep products in production, but sourcing products that have a longer lifespan and are produced with less impact on the environment.

Councils and communities have an opportunity to make a difference in the quantity of waste being sent to landfill using the principles of the three Rs: Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. If Council and the businesses within the community replace the linear take-make-waste model with a circular model based on reused, recycled, or repaired materials and products, the amount of waste sent to landfill would drastically decrease.

With the Benalla Landfill and Resource Recovery site currently accepting waste from other councils, incorporating practices of a circular economy into not only Council's own operations, but mandating other Councils do the same is paramount.

Keeping materials and products in use and treating waste as a resource a circular economy in return will:

- Save costs (potentially boosts Victoria's economy by \$6.7 billion by improving material and efficiency and recycling.⁹)
- Minimise demand on resources.
- Lower carbon emissions.
- Reduce legacy landfill emissions and pollution.

In 2020, the Victorian Government set a progressive plan for a circular economy. From that plan there are five key takeaways that Council can do to start incorporating a circular approach to their waste. They are:¹⁰

- Provide a new four-stream waste and recycling system.
- A cash for cans scheme.
- A stronger waste and recycling industry.
- New recycling laws and governance.
- A statewide ban of single-use plastics.

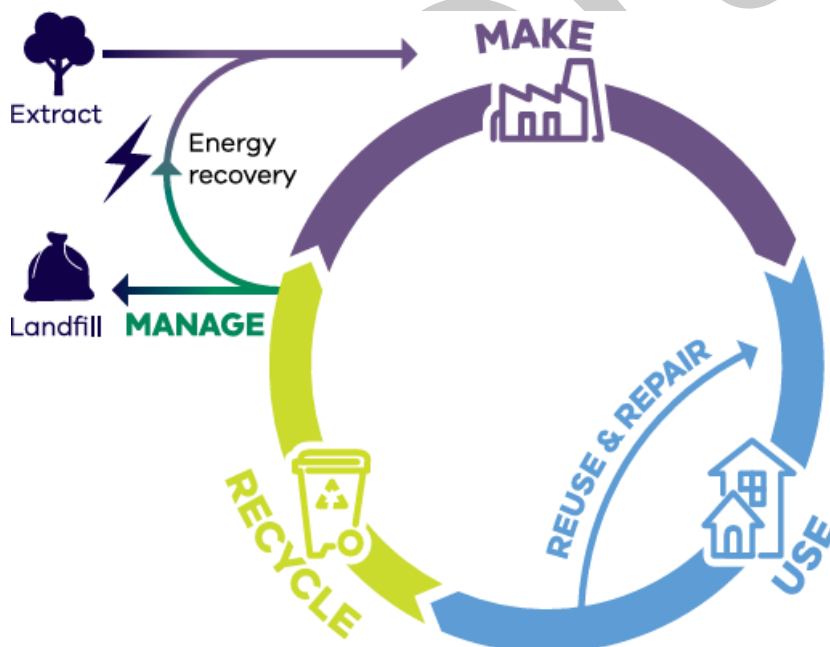


Figure 7: Resource flows in a circular economy

⁹ Retrieved from the Victorian Government's circular economy policy and plan, <https://www.vic.gov.au/victorias-plan-circular-economy>

¹⁰ Retrieved from the Victorian Government's circular economy policy and plan, <https://www.vic.gov.au/victorias-plan-circular-economy>

By implementing a more circular approach to waste Council will be able to benefit significantly. A few of those benefits are outlined below:

- Increase the quality and volume of recycling and reuse of our precious resources.
- Reduce waste, landfill and litter.
- Reduce emissions and contribute to Victoria’s net-zero emissions by 2045.
- Create new jobs.
- Build a sustainable and thriving circular economy for a cleaner, greener Victoria.

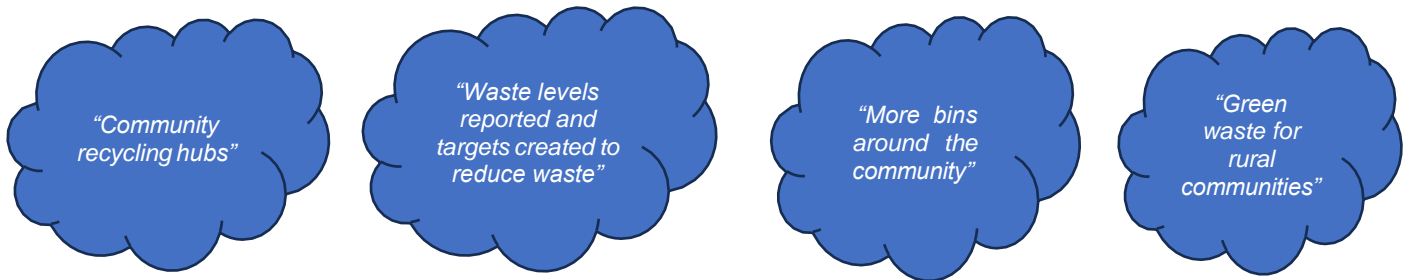


Figure 8: Feedback from community

In response to workshops conducted earlier this year and feedback from the community, Council has set a vision to take the lead and promote a more circular economy within the Benalla community. The actions have been identified in this action plan below.

Table 4: Circular Economy Action Plan

Action Plan	Description	Financial year to be completed
Key Focus Area 3 – Circular Economy	Provide educational programs in response to waste epidemic promoting reuse, recycle and repair.	Ongoing
	Council to conduct a feasibility study to go to fortnightly pickups of the red lid bin in the rural areas.	2025/26
	Council to implement a glass separation bin by 2027.	2027
	Council to consider the feasibility of organics waste bin for rural townships and properties enroute able to opt in.	2025/26
	Council to continue to attract business with a focus on renewable energy services.	Ongoing
	Council to work with businesses to promote the benefits of a circular economy.	Ongoing
	Council to attract business that can process problematic waste.	Ongoing
	Council to update procurement policy to include a focus on environment and sustainability in Council's capital works programs.	2025/26
	Council to increase resource recovery opportunities at Councils owned and operated Resource Recovery Centre, including the feasibility of a resale shop.	2026/27

Case Study: Clothes swap and textile recycling

In June 2022 Benalla Rural City teamed up with A Fitting Connection to host a Clothes Swap at the local CWA hall in Benalla. People could bring five items of clothing to donate and then exchange them for five new-to-them items. It was very well received by the community with around 50 attendees who wanted to see their clothes reused or appropriately recycled. A Fitting Connection works with a company called Upcycle4Better who provided a textile recycling bin at the clothes swap event for any item's leftover at the end.

Building on from this connection with Upcycle4Better a textile recycling program was then put in place at the Benalla Landfill and Resource Recovery Centre. It has been very well received with many people dropping their old clothes, shoes, soft toys, and other textiles off to be recycled or repurposed. The service is free for residents of Benalla to use. This new service means old and unusable textiles can now be diverted from landfill and repurposed or recycled.

Since installing the textile recycling unit at the Resource and Recovery Centre Council have received contact from multiple Victorian councils as well as some interstate Councils. The uptake of textile recycling within Benalla Rural City has been fantastic and will hopefully continue to grow, so less makes its way to landfill.

Key Focus Area 4: Water Sensitive Communities



Water is integral to communities throughout Australia, both in urban and rural landscapes. Having a healthy water system is crucial for human and ecological systems to thrive. It services a large range of activities, from daily residential and business uses to farmland and agricultural irrigation. Water is also a crucial resource for local flora and fauna to thrive and for sustaining our open spaces and natural environment the community uses on a daily basis.

The three most critical challenges Benalla and its surroundings face in managing water are a growing population with varied and changing lifestyles, climate change and a challenging economic environment.

Benalla Lake is a prominent feature of the town that is experiencing ongoing water quality issues from aging sewerage systems and septic tanks leaching into the lake. The flow on effect from the high nutrient loading into the system is water weed infestations and algae bloom outbreaks. Litter and supermarket shopping trollies are also an ongoing issue for the management of the lake. During flood and high rainfall events the lake experiences heavy siltation and further erosion of its banks.

A long-term goal for Benalla will be to become a water sensitive community. A water sensitive community is a place:¹¹

¹¹ Retrieved from CRCWSC website, What makes a city water sensitive, <https://watersensitivecities.org.au/what-is-a-water-sensitive-city/>

- That has the potential to serve as water supply catchment, providing a range of different water sources at a range of different scales and uses.
- That provides ecosystem services and a healthy natural environment, thereby offering a range of social, ecological and economic benefits.
- Where community members have the knowledge and desire to make wise water choices.
- Address lake contamination and water quality.

¹¹ Retrieved from CRCWSC website, What makes a city water sensitive, <https://watersensitivecities.org.au/what-is-a-water-sensitive-city/>

Water sensitive communities can be described as resilient, liveable, productive and sustainable.

- In a water sensitive community, the way the community interacts with the water cycle plays a crucial part by¹²:
- Providing the water security essential for economic prosperity through efficient use of diverse available resources.
- Enhancing and protecting the health of waterways and wetlands and the river basins that surround them.
- Mitigating flood risk and damage.
- Creating public spaces that collect, clean and recycle water.

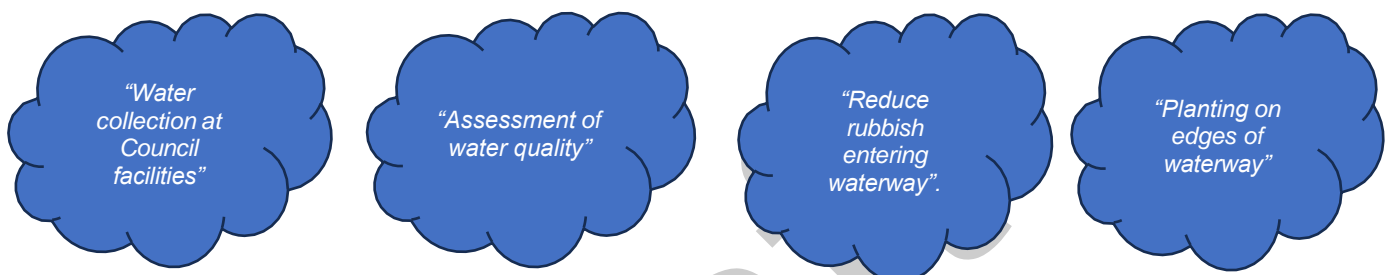


Figure 9: Feedback from community

¹² Retrieved from CRCWSC website, What makes a city water sensitive, <https://watersensitivecities.org.au/what-is-a-water-sensitive-city/>

In response to workshops conducted earlier this year and feedback from the community, the Council has set a vision to manage stormwater and water across the municipality. This is the first step needed in order to become a more water sensitive community, and the action outlined will help the Council achieve this vision.

Table 5: Water Sensitive Communities Action Plan

Action Plan	Description	Financial year to be completed
Key Focus Area 4 – Water Sensitive Communities	Council to create a stormwater management plan in response to the contamination, litter and weed issues in the town’s lake.	2026/27
	Council to continue to promote water reduction activities.	Ongoing
	Council to partner with lead agencies on water related issues.	Ongoing

Case Study: Cabomba in Lake Benalla

Cabomba (*Cabomba caroliniana*) is an introduced aquatic weed that originated from South America. Cabomba is listed as a Weed of National Significance and regarded as one of the worst weeds in Australia. Cabomba spreads rapidly, reproducing vegetatively from stem fragments which easily break away from the parent plant. Cabomba was identified in Benalla in 1990 with major treatments done in 2009, 2010, 2012, 2018 and 2021. Past treatments have included a combination of drawing down the water level in Lake Benalla to allow the Cabomba to dry out, as well as mechanical removal.

Current treatment methods are expensive, weather dependent and aesthetically unpleasant. Due to this, new treatment methods are being explored with one currently being tested on a couple of sites in Queensland. The Cabomba weevil (*Hydrotimetes natans*) is an aquatic weevil that spends its entire lifecycle on Cabomba plants, causing substantial damage to the plant both in the adult and larval stages.

Trials are currently underway at multiple sites in Queensland and NSW following positive testing results from CSIRO. Although, the Cabomba weevil is unlikely to remove the weed altogether it may prevent the frequency of large infestations and keep Cabomba at more manageable levels.

Since the last drawdown in 2021, there have been no reports of Cabomba in the Lake Benalla area. However, it is unlikely Cabomba has disappeared altogether and will likely show up again. Benalla Rural City will continue to work closely with the GB CMA to monitor Cabomba in Lake Benalla and assess potential major infestations.

Key Focus Area 5: Sustainable Communities



A sustainable community takes into account the five capitals models which provides a framework for sustainability at all levels. It accounts for the human, social, natural, financial and manufactured capital of a society and makes sure all are addressed fairly and equitably, while ensuring resources to sustain a community are available now and for future generations. It's a place where diverse backgrounds and perspectives are welcomed, and where all groups within that society can come together to make decisions for the betterment of their community.

Sustainable communities require long-term planning, where the decisions we make as a society today will have major impacts decades later. One of the biggest threats to sustainable communities is climate change. To that end, action needs to be taken now to build upon the work Council has already undertaken to develop a sustainable and resilient Benalla.

The Green Building Council of Australia worked with local councils and key stakeholders to identify five principles that support the sustainable transformation for a society. The five principles are:¹³

- Demonstrate visionary leadership and strong governance.
- Enhance liveability.
- Create opportunities for economic prosperity.
- Foster environment responsibility.
- Embrace design excellence and innovation.

These principles require a collaborative approach from all sectors within Benalla's community to see this vision achieved.

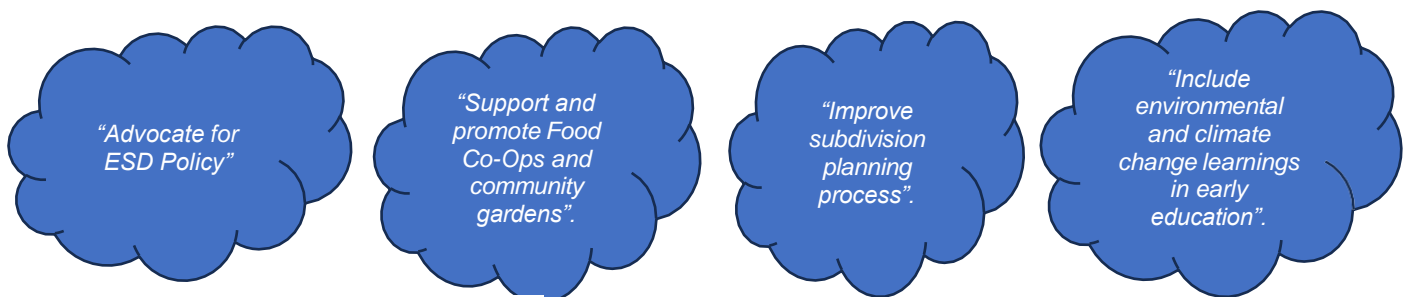


Figure 10: Feedback from community

In response to workshops conducted earlier this year and feedback from the community, Council has set a vision to become a more sustainable community. By incorporating these actions into this Strategy Council will be able to meet it's target and vision for this focus area.

¹³ Retrieved from Green Building Council of Australia. Green Star- Communities Guide for Local Government

Table 6: Sustainable Communities Action Plan

Action Plan	Description	Financial year to be completed
Key Focus Area 5 – Sustainable Communities	Council to partner with health agencies to promote the benefits of home garden.	Ongoing
	Council to create a food share space	2025/26
	Consider the establishment of a native food garden.	2025/26
	Recognise and protect the integrity of traditional indigenous NRM knowledge, support traditional knowledge exchange and when permitted use it with respect.	Ongoing
	Embed Climate Resilient Infrastructure checklists into relevant processes for designing and maintaining infrastructure.	2025/26
	Embed Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD) principles into all new developments.	Ongoing
	Council to engage with those who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and those who are socially and economically disadvantaged, to build understanding and resilience to climate change.	Ongoing

Case Study: Benalla Grow Your Own – Benalla Health

Between 2016-19 the Benalla Grow Your Own (BGYO) project provided 74 wicking garden beds to vulnerable families living in Benalla. The garden beds were built in partnership with Benalla Health, St Vincent de Paul Society of Benalla, Beechworth Correctional Centre and Benalla Men's Shed.

The project was established in response to the growing issue of food insecurity from young families in Benalla. A food security scan prior to the project indicated 8.4 per cent of residents in Benalla had reported that they had run out of food and were unable to purchase more in the last 12 months. With food insecurity also correlated with low fruit and vegetable intake.

In 2021 a Survey was completed by 47.4 per cent of eligible participants to assess the results of the program. Of the surveyed, 93 per cent felt they were better able to provide for their family with 85 per cent indicating life was better because of the garden. Half indicated they had increased their gardening activities during the COVID-19 Pandemic and 63 per cent indicated improved mental health.

The garden beds continue to assist families save money, improve confidence growing their own food whilst improving nutrition, physical activity, social connection, and mental health outcomes.

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Action Plan:

Table 7: Council Action Plan for Key Focus Areas

Action Plan	Description	Financial year to be completed	Progress made to-date
Key Focus Area 1- Net Zero	Council to employ an Officer to a minimum of 0.6 FTE position to assist in the delivery of the Strategy and Net Zero Action Plan.	2025/26	
	Transition to 100 per cent renewable energy (VECO 2.0).	2024/25	
	Transition Council's passenger vehicle fleet to low carbon vehicles.	2029/30	
	Transition Council's vans to low carbon vehicles.	2026/27	
	Transition Council's utility vehicles to low carbon vehicles.	2032/33	
	Review the current Fleet Strategy to include EVs in the replacement cycle.	2024/25	
	Audit Council owned buildings to transition to net zero or lower emission buildings and facilities.	Ongoing	
	Council to demonstrate leadership in response to Climate Change	Ongoing	
	Install solar PV onto all suitable Council owned buildings.	2026/27	
	Explore opportunities for a community battery or microgrid.	2025/26	
	Ensure changing rainfall, flooding, bushfire and drought patterns are included in all Council strategies and asset management plans where applicable.	Ongoing	
	Incorporate the new Climate and Environment Strategy in the review of the planning scheme to help inform our local policy in the planning scheme.	2026/27	

Action Plan	Description	Financial year to be completed	Progress made to-date
Key Focus Area 2 – Increase Biodiversity	Council to increase tree planting program to create habitat for fauna and flora.	2024/25	
	Council to review the roadside management plan with consideration to pest and weed control program.	2024/25	
	Council to partner with other agencies to advocate and protect wildlife.	Ongoing	
	Support the Winton Wetlands restoration project where possible.	Ongoing	
	Council to continue to work on rehabilitating the Holland Bio Link.	Ongoing	
	Council to deliver a New Pest and Weed Control plan.	2023/24	
	Map and register trees of cultural significance on public property.	2024/25	
	Mapping of existing tree canopy in the Benalla Rural City	Ongoing	
Key Focus Area 3 – Circular Economy	Provide educational programs in response to waste epidemic promoting reuse, recycle and repair.	Ongoing	
	Council to conduct a feasibility study to go to fortnightly pickups of the red lid bin in the rural areas.	2025/26	
	Council to implement a glass separation bin by 2027.	2027	
	Council to consider the feasibility of organics waste bin for rural townships and properties enroute able to opt in.	2025/26	
	Council to continue to attract business with a focus on renewable energy services.	Ongoing	
	Council to work with businesses to promote the benefits of a circular economy.	Ongoing	

Action Plan	Description	Financial year to be completed	Progress made to-date
	Council to attract business that can process problematic waste.	Ongoing	
	Council to update procurement policy to include a focus on environment and sustainability in Council's capital works programs.	2025/26	
	Council to increase resource recovery opportunities at Councils owned and operated Resource Recovery Centre, including the feasibility of a resale shop.	2026/27	
Key Focus Area 4 – Water Sensitive Communities	Council to create a stormwater management plan in response to the contamination, litter and weed issues in the town's lake.	2026/27	
	Council to continue to promote water reduction activities.	Ongoing	
	Council to partner with lead agencies on water related issues.	Ongoing	
Key Focus Area 5 – Sustainable Communities	Council to partner with health agencies to promote the benefits of home garden.	Ongoing	
	Council to create a food share space	2025/26	
	Consider the establishment a native food garden.	2025/26	
	Recognise and protect the integrity of traditional indigenous NRM knowledge, support traditional knowledge exchange and when permitted use it with respect	Ongoing	
	Embed Climate Resilient Infrastructure checklists into relevant processes for designing and maintaining infrastructure	2025/26	
	Embed Environmentally Sensitive Design (ESD) principles into all development	Ongoing	
	Council to engage with those who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and those who are socially and economically disadvantaged, to build understanding and resilience to climate change.	Ongoing	

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RURAL CITY COUNCIL

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2024 - 2029

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