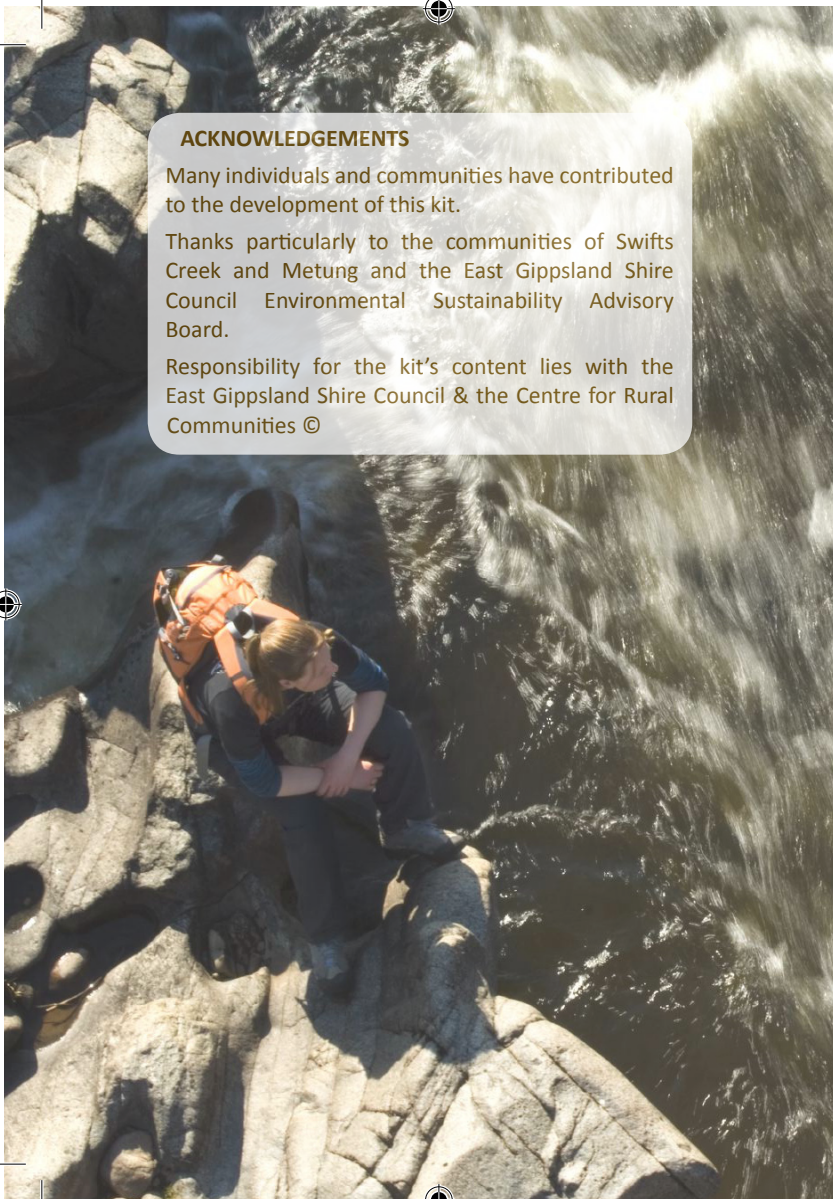




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putting
sustainability
on the
agenda





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many individuals and communities have contributed to the development of this kit.

Thanks particularly to the communities of Swifts Creek and Metung and the East Gippsland Shire Council Environmental Sustainability Advisory Board.

Responsibility for the kit's content lies with the East Gippsland Shire Council & the Centre for Rural Communities ©



EAST GIPPSLAND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

The East Gippsland Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2008–2013 outlines East Gippsland Shire's position on issues relating to the protection, preservation and enhancement of the environment and consolidates the Shire's existing achievements, policies and plans about environmental sustainability.

The Strategy highlights Council's progress on major considerations for environmental sustainability – including biodiversity, water quality and consumption, greenhouse gas emissions and waste management, among others and identifies key actions to support movement toward more sustainable operations.



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SUSTAINABILITY – ON THE AGENDA

The East Gippsland Shire Council has put ‘sustainability’ high on its agenda. It has developed an Environmental Sustainability Strategy and is now in the process of ‘rolling it out’ across the region - consulting, planning and implementing.

So what better place to start than to look and listen to its own communities who are already setting the pace, with their ideas, energy, vision, and action.

The aim? To find out what really matters to local communities; to learn how some are already tackling the big issues; and then to help every group, organisation and business in the Shire to put sustainability at the top of their own agendas.

The creation of this Environmental Sustainability Toolkit is another step towards that end – a set of tools to help bring sustainability issues into the community planning process – a new lens through which to view your communities, ideas and actions.

The Toolkit provides information and examples, poses questions and suggests some checklists to help ‘see’ the environmental impact of our household, business and community actions.

Look at what you plan to do through a sustainability lens and you will see a different world.





THE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY TOOLKIT

The Toolkit is made up of 3 parts:

The Primer

An introduction to sustainability issues.

Here we look at the major environmental concerns at the global level - climate change, peak oil and ecological footprints. We then discuss the main local issues identified in a range of surveys undertaken across East Gippsland, and ask what can be done at the community level to make a difference?

Case Study Cards

A series of thought-provoking stories based on projects that demonstrate great ideas at work. Each card describes how real people are reducing their ecological footprint and building a stronger community.

The Matrix

A wall chart 'grid' to help groups identify and talk about their sustainability concerns, and then find resources and networks that could help them plan for action.





SUSTAINABILITY - A DEFINITION

The term 'sustainability' has come into common usage lately. We are generally familiar with what is meant when people talk about environmental sustainability.

In a nutshell, *sustainability is about making sure the social, economic and environmental needs of our community are met while ensuring that the environment is kept healthy for future generations.*

Of course simply by 'living' we have an impact upon the environment – we build houses and roads, we consume goods – everything from the daily newspaper to wide screen televisions - all of which use natural resources, consume energy and have an impact on the environment.

So sustainability doesn't mean having no impact on the environment – but it does mean *thinking responsibly* about how much of the earth's resources we use as individuals, as communities and as societies.

Why? Because of three major environmental issues that are impacting ecologically, socially and economically upon our communities - climate change, peak oil and our ecological footprint.





3 MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

i) **Climate change** is one of the global challenges we need to prepare for. It's a global problem with local impacts. The Victorian Government predicts that East Gippsland will become hotter – especially in summer - and drier, particularly in spring. This will mean a 50% decrease in runoff into the Mitchell, Tambo and Snowy Rivers by 2070. Although rainfall will decrease overall, severe storms are likely to increase. Sea level rise and tidal surges will impact on coastal communities.

ii) **Peak Oil** is another of those global challenges. Put simply, peak oil means the 'easy (cheaper)-to-get' oil is fast running out, and we will become reliant on the 'harder (dearer)-to-get' oil.

iii) Our **Ecological Footprint** is too big!

One way of understanding our impact on the environment as a society is by measuring our 'ecological footprint'. The ecological footprint measures humanity's demand on the biosphere in terms of the area of biologically productive land and sea required to provide the resources we use and to absorb our waste. Ecological footprint calculators – available on the web – estimate how many hectares are needed to support our lifestyle.



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The average Victorian has one of the world's biggest ecological footprints (6.8 hectares per person) while the actual land available per person on earth is 2.1 hectares. If everyone lived like us, we would need more than four Earths. The biggest contributor to our ecological footprint in Australia is the energy used in transport and in our homes.

HOW WE ALL IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Sustainability is about everything we do, from how we look after the environment, to how our local economy works, through to how we get on with our neighbours.

"Do unto those downstream as you would have those upstream do unto you." (Wendell Berry) is an excellent maxim.

Looking at our actions through a 'sustainability lens' enables us to see the effects of our decisions on our environment, our economy and our society. It shows up things we might otherwise miss when we consider our day-to-day operations, or plan our events and projects.

A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Some people passionately believe we are consuming all the earth's resources in a reckless manner – while others equally passionately believe that technology will always find new ways to support our lifestyle. These types of discussions are generally taking a 'big picture' view – looking at the whole world - the global perspective.





A LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

Often the discussions we have in our own community about our local environment come up with different sustainability issues. The East Gippsland Environmental Sustainability Strategy (2008-2013) identified these 6 areas of action:

Biodiversity: maintaining and restoring our natural assets, **Water, Energy and Waste:** using resources more effectively, **Land Use and Economic Development:** reducing our everyday environmental impacts.

Our research in developing this Toolkit confirmed that people are concerned about these key areas. For instance - farming practices that cause soil erosion and degrade our rivers; the impact of land clearance and logging on habitat; and the state of the Snowy and other rivers featured large. Dependence on our cars is a fact of living in many of our communities, where public transport is limited or non-existent, making it difficult to reduce our reliance on oil.

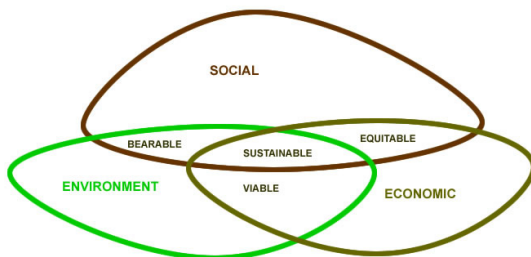
Local conversations ranged across issues such as rising costs and decreasing returns for primary production; the loss of local employment – particularly for our children; through to planning and development issues in our community – even to what future economic activity will most benefit our ability to live and work here.



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ENVIRONMENTAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL IMPACTS

Clearly sustainability issues aren't just about the environment; there is a strong interconnection of environmental issues with economic and social aspects.



There are issues where economics and environment meet. Damming a river can provide water for economic benefits, but then negatively impact on our lakes environmentally, which then affects the economic activity based around the lakes (and so on!).

There are areas where our social wellbeing and the environment intersect. The social and health benefits to people that come from a healthy environment are well recognised.

The connection between environmental sustainability issues and the rest of our lives is clear. But complex.





FINDING SOLUTIONS

Sometimes, what might *seem* like a good solution can end up adding to the problem – or even creating another problem!

Take drink containers as an example. Some people believe that the voluntary recycling of drink containers is the best response we can make to the millions of plastic, glass and aluminium containers we use everyday.

Other people believe that putting deposit legislation in place will provide a better outcome (and look to the South Australian experience to support their argument).

Still other people believe that we simply shouldn't produce so many take-away drink containers in the first place. They argue that recycling – while it may use less energy directly in remanufacture – still uses massive amounts of energy in transport etc.

THINKING ABOUT THE HIDDEN COSTS

Most of us are doing our bit to reduce our household energy and water use. It all helps, but much of the water and energy we consume is embodied in the food and other items we consume.

Information about the hidden environmental costs of many products and services is hard to come by. In fact, direct household and individual use accounts for only 30 percent of our total greenhouse gas pollution, 23 percent of our total water use, and just 10 percent of our total eco-footprint.*

* Source: <http://www.acfonline.org.au/consumptionatlas/>



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We need to be ‘smart’ consumers. Smart consumption doesn’t mean going without things we genuinely want or need. On the contrary, it is about being conscious of the environmental and financial implications of our buying decisions.

In most categories of goods and services, we have a choice between more and less environmentally sound options. By choosing products that require fewer resources to produce, package and transport, we can reduce our contribution to climate change and water use.

- Buy recycled and recyclable – in general recycled products are much more environmentally sound than products made from new raw materials.
- Buy quality – durable goods that won’t have to be replaced in a year’s time.
- Buy efficient – consider not only the upfront costs of items, but their running costs over the product’s life.
- Buy in neighbourhood groups - Sharing less frequently used items such as power tools and gardening equipment with neighbours saves space as well as money.
- Think about food miles - consider buying local produce.

‘IT’S UP TO THE GOVERNMENT’

When the conversations get this complex it is little wonder that most of us think it is all too hard for us as individuals or communities. Surely it’s ‘up to the government’ to solve?

Well ... probably not. Some sustainability issues *will* need a concerted response from government if the dire predictions are to be averted.





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But you only need to look around at our own East Gippsland communities - and many others around the world - to see that there are other ways to take positive action, on any scale.

LOCAL ACTIONS. GLOBAL IMPACT

Sustainability is about handing on a world to our children in as good a condition as we can. We all want to do that. And our own households, businesses and communities are a good place to start.

The East Gippsland Shire Council's *Sustainability Strategy* acknowledges the need to:

- *develop more sustainable communities;*
- *model positive environmental change; and*
- *help everyone understand how they individually affect our environment.*

We only need to look around us to find brilliant examples in action - and we need to share them! We should hold them up for the world to see, shake their hands with heartfelt gratitude, support them, and spread the word.

Take Landcare as an example. Universally applauded, this program has had a massive impact on our environment – by gradually changing (over the last 25 years) the way many people think about - and tackle - environmental issues. Essentially, Landcare is made up of individual groups in local communities doing small scale jobs really well.



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Local groups deciding what's important in their area, taking ownership of the plan and seeing it through with a sense of camaraderie. Important principles for good outcomes.

The Toolkit's Case Study Cards are an excellent showcase of community-based ideas producing footprint-reducing outcomes - from bottling fruit to saving the rare Colquhoun Grevillea, to introducing a fleet of push bikes at Gippsland Lakes Community Health!

WHERE TO START

A sustainability lens enables us to see the effects of our decisions on our environment, our economy and our society. It shows up things we might otherwise miss when we plan events and projects. Making a point of thinking about environmental impacts in all our actions (applying the sustainability lens) will eventually change an organisation's culture of planning and decision-making.

QUESTIONS & CHECKLISTS TO CONSIDER

1. What impact does it have on the environment?

- Is it in the right location (transport, solar aspect etc.)?
- Are any vulnerable plants and animals harmed by the plans?
- Can recycled and recyclable materials be used?
- Does it minimise the use of resources like water and energy?
- Are there facilities to reduce and separate the wastes and recycle them where possible?



2. What materials and labour can we source locally?

Using local skills and materials makes sense. It reduces our ecological footprint and benefits from the wealth of skills and experience in our communities and region. It helps local business and food producers and can mean new jobs in our communities.

3. Does this activity answer local needs?

This one looks obvious, but unless people have worked out together what will benefit their community, valuable resources can be spent on the projects which don't get used rather than on facilities and activities the community and local environment needs.

4. How will it affect different groups in our community?

Making sure everyone benefits is best guaranteed by seeking out the views and including in the decision-making process the people who often don't speak up: children, young people, parents with young children, elderly people and others who can't make meetings.

5. How can government help? Tackling issues means understanding relevant government legislation and regulations and becoming aware of the resources governments can provide.

WHERE TO NOW?

Essentially this Toolkit hopes to encapsulate what we've learned so far (from people like you).



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We suggest:

- Be aware of the big issues - and their complexity.
- Understand them as well as you can - not to be overwhelmed, but to be aware of what local actions may have the best impact.
- Have conversations in your community about the things that concern you.
- Identify local issues - write them down. Use the Matrix to help brainstorm problems and solutions and then to find useful contacts, networks and resources to support you.
- Network – with your neighbours, with other community organisations, with other communities.
- And always remember the sustainability hierarchy:
Reduce. Reuse. Repair. Recycle.

ENJOY THE JOURNEY

Environment and the Community - sustainability involves care for both. The process is as important as the goal of sustainability. These guidelines are a kind of checklist to help you get the process right.

Dialogue: Ask and listen. Be a partner not a director. Respect differences and find common ground.

Time: Change takes time. Trust takes time to establish. Personal and community development take time. An initial investment in time will pay off immeasurably in the long term.

Local community ownership: Broad ownership of ideas will evolve if support is offered rather than ideas being imposed. Nurturing involvement is a positive investment.





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Co-operative culture: Projects are about mutual development and working together as a community. Learn and practice group participation skills to enable people to work together. Be clear about roles and responsibilities and good communication.

Networking: Have gatherings with other communities. Newsletters, chatlines and radio are useful sources of information. Invite people to meet with your group and visit others involved in similar projects.

Visioning: Establishing trust is a pre-requisite for people to speak freely about their hopes and visions.

Action: Begin by implementing change in a small way. Celebrate the milestones.

Reflection: Evaluate constructively. Before and after records are valuable information (use photos/stories/financial records/other data) – keep good records and use them to look back and see where your group can improve its processes. Evaluation* – both of process and outcome – are important reflections for a group.

Transformation: Check if there is new confidence and involvement. Are there new stories and new language? All are evidence of how people feel about a place and help the group develop the next project.

Repeat!



NOTES

Your feedback & suggestions would be appreciated.

**Contact East Gippsland Shire Council's Sustainability Coordinator: (03)5153 9500
or the Centre for Rural Communities: www.ruralcommunities.com.au**





see the **toolkit** case studies for more sustainable ideas