

Environmental Sustainability Strategy Framework 2021



South Gippsland
Shire Council



Acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians

The South Gippsland Shire Council respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of this Land, Elders past, present and emerging, their Spirits, and Ancestors. We recognise Australia's rich cultural heritage and aim to encourage integrated decision making now and in the future.

Our Purpose

To serve in the best interests of the whole Shire, delivering quality services, and advocating for community needs.

Our Sustainability Vision

South Gippsland Shire Council values its local people, flora, fauna and ecosystems, collaboratively engaging with its community and other partners to retain and enhance the unique environment of the region.

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1. Introduction

South Gippsland is blessed with unique and striking natural beauty in its landscapes, coastlines and ecosystems which are inherently valued by the human and non-human inhabitants of the region; and equally by the many visitors. The retention and enhancement of this natural environment is a priority for South Gippsland Shire Council.

The retention of the integrity of this natural environment isn't without its challenges, the biggest of which is the implications of a changing climate. Climate change is a global challenge with local impacts and local responsibilities. Coupled with a global loss of biodiversity and ecosystems, these parallel and interrelated global catastrophes present us with both a clear choice and opportunity to re-imagine the future.

As a municipality affected by climate change, and with predictions for increasing impacts into the future, we face two parallel challenges:

1. to adapt to the changing climate in a way that rediscovers the balance between our people and our environment; and
2. to mitigate our impact on the environment by reducing our municipal emissions across the board in order to reduce the likelihood of the worst impacts of climate change.

Now more than ever we must seek opportunity to more efficiently use our local resources for the betterment of our communities.



1.1 Context

There are number of acts, policies and plans implemented by the Victorian State Parliament which encourage or oblige Council to act on environmental sustainability and climate change.

Further details of specific acts, legislation and guidance documents relevant to each of the three areas covered by this Strategy are outlined in the relevant sections, below.

Local Government Act 2020 (Victoria)

Section 9 of the Local Government Act 2020 outlines “Overarching governance principles and supporting principles”, stating that a Council must “in the performance of its role give effect to the overarching governance principles”, specifying the following amongst those principles:

- b) priority is to be given to achieving the best outcomes for the municipal community, including future generations;
- c) the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the municipal district, including mitigation and planning for climate change risks, is to be promoted;
- d) the municipal community is to be engaged in strategic planning and strategic decision making; and
- h) regional, state, and national plans and policies are to be taken into account during Council's strategic planning and decision making.

1.2 Scope and Boundaries

It is important to recognise the context in which we operate, and understand the boundaries around our areas of influence. There are areas we have direct control over, others where we can merely influence an outcome, and others still where we have an interest or concern, but have little or no ability to impact on the outcomes. As such, while we strive to achieve the vision and aims of this strategy, the desired outcome cannot be guaranteed, regardless of our actions.

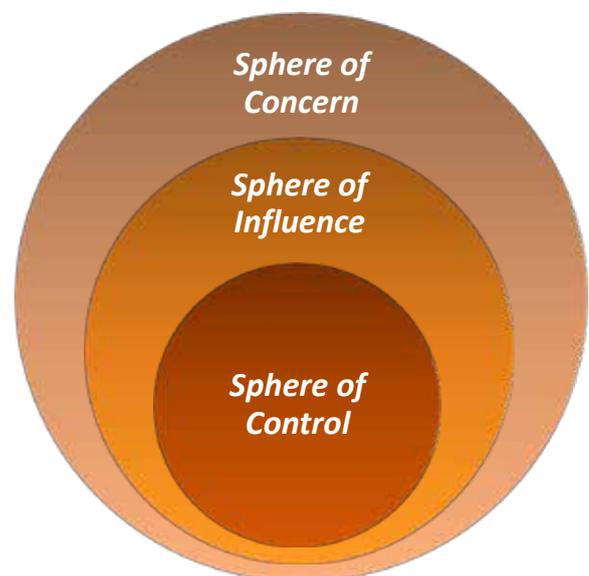
For example, South Gippsland Shire Council has control over our operations and activities. We control the way we collect and manage waste, the greenhouse gas emissions from our purchased electricity and the vehicles we drive, the administration of the Planning Scheme, and the way we manage council-owned land.

On the other hand, Council has influence over activities and actions within the community, however no direct control. We have a key leadership and advocacy role for the people of the municipality and their actions, and the ability to influence decisions made by the community.

Where Council can influence environmental and sustainability outcomes for the Shire, it has a responsibility to do so.

Finally, there is a broad range of activity which Council has no direct or indirect control over, however maintains a level of concern. These relate to activity occurring outside the municipality, such as State or Federal policy, global greenhouse gas emissions, climate systems, etc.

While our influence in this sphere may be limited to advocating in our interest, we have an obligation to understand this space and the impact on the delivery of this Strategy, and to adjust the Strategy in response to external changes and developments. As such, this Strategy is seen as an organic and evolving document without time boundaries, which will be reviewed periodically in response to factors beyond our control, as additional information emerges.



A clear understanding of the delineation between these three spheres is essential to the effective and efficient delivery of services. Where Council can influence or control an outcome to support this Strategy, we have an obligation to do so.



1.3 Structure and Function

This Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2021 provides a context and broad platform for our work in this space. It is broken into the three over-arching and interrelated areas of:

1. Climate Change
2. Waste Management and Resource Recovery
3. Sustainable Land Use and Biodiversity

This Strategy builds on Council's previous work in this space, as outlined in the South Gippsland Shire Sustainability Strategy 2016-2020. However, where the previous Strategy provided both an overarching context as well as detailing specific actions, it is intended that this document will simply "set the scene" for our work in this space, with the detail to come in subsequent strategic documents.

Separately, we will develop three individual actions plans for each of the above three focus areas. These action plans will set targets, specify actions and detail desired outcomes relevant to each sector.

This Strategy will be a living document, to be updated and renewed on an 'as needed' basis. Given the fast pace of evolution in the sustainability space, in response to the latest scientific information, economic and societal developments, as well as community desires, it is anticipated that this document will evolve and grow to continually represent Council's direction in the environmental sustainability realm.

VISION

South Gippsland values its local people, flora, fauna, and ecosystems, collaboratively engaging with its community to retain and enhance the unique environment of the region

Environmental Sustainability Strategy Framework

Climate Action
Plan

Sustainable Land Use
Plan

Waste and Resource
Recovery

2. Climate Change



2.1 Background

Climate Change is the biggest threat we face, both as a local community and as a global society. With its impacts being already felt across the globe, and scientific forecasts predicting significant acceleration of the effects of climate change in the coming decades, the challenges of addressing climate change are real and present.

South Gippsland Shire Council has both a moral and legal obligation to both adapt to the irreversible impacts of a changing climate, and to work towards reducing emissions across the municipality to mitigate against the worst impacts of climate change.

South Gippsland relies on key industries such as agriculture and tourism which are particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts. Extreme weather events, disrupted rainfall patterns and seasonality, sea level rise and coastal inundation are all dangerous and disruptive to these industries. Understanding, adapting to and mitigating the impacts of climate change is essential to maximise future opportunities for the region.

2.2 Context

There are a number of State Government acts, plans and guidelines which impact our work in this space.

Climate Change Act 2017 (Victoria) and legislation

The Climate Change Act 2017 (Vic) requires decision makers to regard climate change mitigation and adaptation action when making decisions or implementing actions.

Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2017 – 2020

Victoria's Climate Change Adaptation Plan includes a commitment to partnering with local government on adaptation to help build local government capacity and collaborative action.

Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019–2023

The Public Health and Wellbeing Plan acknowledges that climate change is “a leading threat to health and wellbeing” and “tackling climate change and its impact on health” is one of four key focus areas in the plan.

Duty of Care

A State Government guidance document, entitled Local Government Climate Change Adaptation Roles and Responsibilities under Victorian Legislation, details the duty of care which statutory authorities have when exercising their functions and powers. It outlines the need for councils and council staff to ensure all decisions are:

- evidence based, and rely on effective consultation with both experts and the community;
- follow a rigorous process and risk-management principles, particularly for higher-risks decisions; and
- ensure all information leading to a decision is retained, and be publicly available.



2.3 Previous Work

Council's historical work in the climate change space has been governed by two separate documents:

1. South Gippsland Shire Council Sustainability Strategy 2016 – 2020
2. South Gippsland Shire Council Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan

Where the Strategy provided the context, direction and specific actions across the whole of Council's work in sustainability for the four-year term of Council – including a section on climate change – the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan focussed on measuring and actively reducing Council's corporate emissions.

The Plan, developed in 2013, detailed a 10-year emissions reduction target for Council, as well as proposing a pathway for emissions reductions from Council operations. The target of a 20% reduction in emissions on 2009/10 levels by the year 2020 was adopted, and a Revolving Sustainability Fund was established to implement actions to reduce corporate emissions in order to achieve the target.

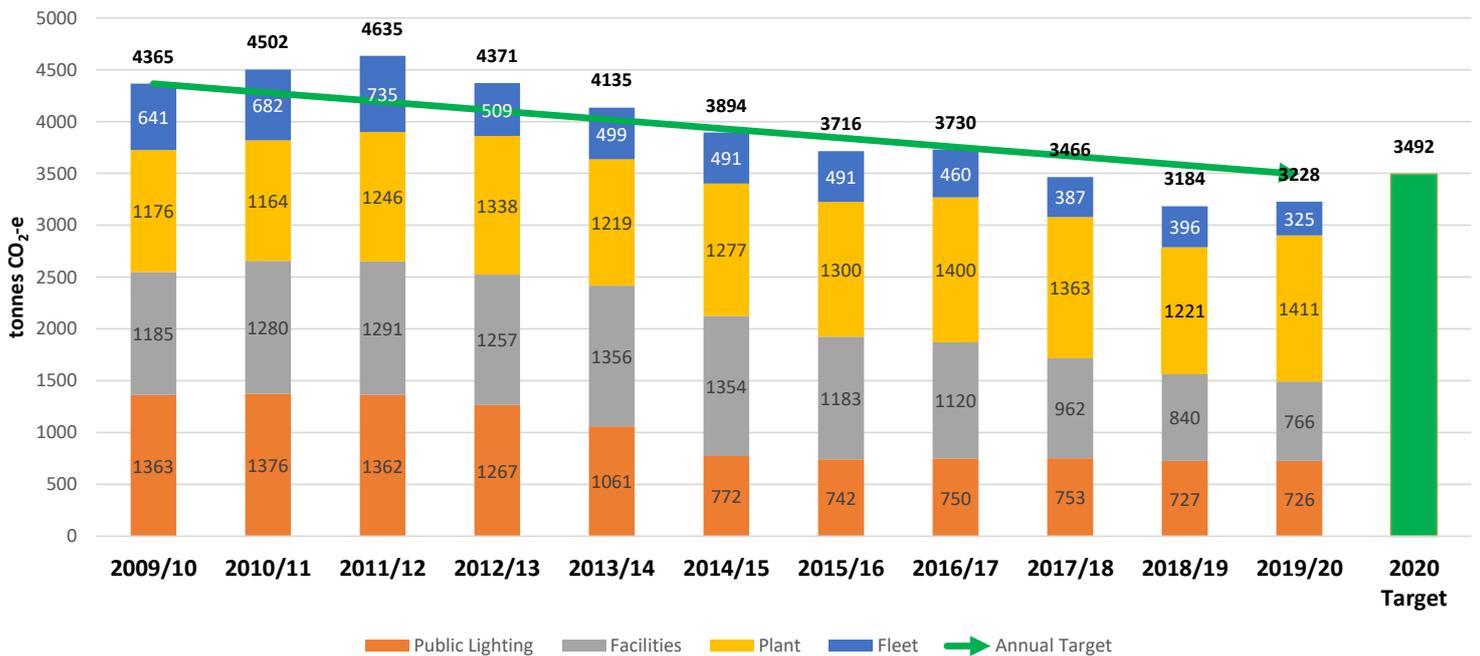
Over the 10-year period covered by the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan and target, Council has managed to significantly reduce direct operational emissions by

873 tonnes of CO₂-e, or 26 per cent, exceeding the 20 per cent target by 264 tonnes.

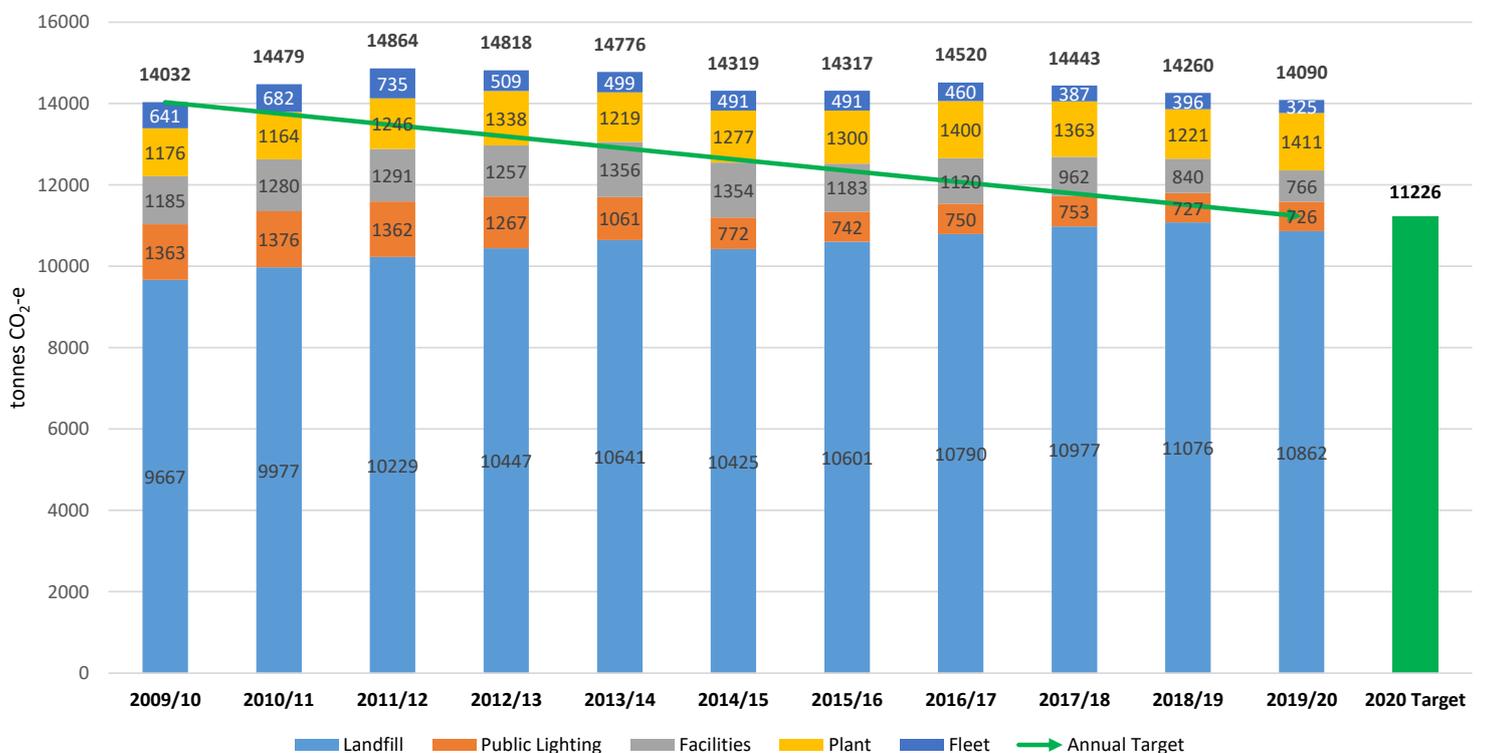
However, when including emissions from Council-owned and managed landfills, there was actually a slight increase in emissions of 58 tonnes of CO₂-e, or 0.4 per cent on the 2009/10 baseline. This is due to the ongoing release of methane from organic materials (predominantly food waste) buried in Council's landfills. While these emissions aren't directly attributable to Council's operations, we are required to report on these emissions as the landfills themselves are under our operational control.

Further work around mitigation – such as addressing greenhouse gas emissions from the broader municipality – as well as adaptation measures were dealt with via specific actions within the Sustainability Strategy itself, via the sections on Energy and Water, Climate Change and Community.

South Gippsland Shire Council Emissions Minus Landfill (t CO₂-e) by Year and 2020 Target



South Gippsland Shire Council Total Emissions (t CO₂-e) by Year and 2020 Target





2.4 Aims and Goals

Going forward, Council sees a need to broaden our focus on both adaptation and mitigation. The clear direction given in the Local Government Act 2020 that Council must “give effect to the overarching governance principles” including the principal that “mitigation and planning for climate change risks, is to be promoted”, leaves no room for interpretation when it comes to Council’s responsibilities.

Opportunities exist for Council to broaden its work in planning to adapt to climate change, helping facilitate adaptation measures across the municipality. In addition, Council will consider expanding measures to reduce emissions from both Council operations and the broader municipality, to assist with the mitigation of climate change.

Council’s future work in climate change will be governed through implementation of a new Climate Action Plan, which will be developed with extensive internal and community consultation to reflect the community’s desires and ambition in this space. The Climate Action Plan will then be considered by an elected Council following elections scheduled for late 2021.

This Action Plan will include emissions reduction targets and pathways for Council going forward, as well as detailed and concrete actions to be undertaken in order to achieve Council’s goals in both climate change mitigation and adaptation.

3. Waste Management and Resource Recovery





3.1 Background

Council provides a range of waste management and recycling services to the South Gippsland Community, with the aim to recover materials for recycling and reuse and reduce the amount of waste disposed of to landfill. Services include:

- Weekly kerbside garbage and fortnightly recycling and green waste collections to approximately 12,500 properties;
- An annual booked hard waste collection;
- The provision of 90 public place recycling bins and 280 litter bins strategically located throughout the Shire;
- Operation of six transfer stations, diverting approximately 2,800 tonnes of recyclable material from landfill each year;
- The operation of the Koonwarra Landfill managing the disposal of an average of 18,000 tonnes of waste per year; and
- Management and aftercare of two former landfill sites at Foster and Koonwarra.

All services are currently delivered by contractors with the exception of landfill operation and management, which is undertaken in-house. Councils Waste Management Strategy 2016-2021 guides the planning and delivery of waste management services.

3.2 Context

Over recent years the waste and recycling industry as a whole, has experienced unprecedented upheaval and change due to a number of factors. As a result, the manner in which Council is able to provide waste management and recycling services has been impacted and significant cost increases have occurred.

A critical driver of industry change and associated cost increases was the introduction by China of their “National Sword Policy” which banned many waste material streams from being imported into China as had been occurring for many years.

This meant that many materials such as mixed plastics, and other recyclable material streams with more than 0.5% contamination were no longer able to be exported for recycling, but had to be sorted and recycled in Australia. It quickly became apparent that the capacity of the materials recycling industry in Victoria (and Australia) was not able to manage the increased volume of material that needed to be processed locally and that new waste management legislation was needed to drive change.

Another significant impact on the waste management industry will be the introduction, from July 2021 of a new Environmental Protection Act in Victoria which moves the onus of environmental protection onto companies, businesses and individuals to plan for and prevent environmental risks rather than acting after an incident, which is the basis of the current Act.

The new Act also makes provision for a Waste Authority which will be a stand-alone State Government body with a role across the waste

management activities of the State Government including planning. The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) will maintain their role in developing waste policy, EPA will continue to be the regulatory and enforcement body and Sustainability Victoria will be responsible for market development. The Waste Authority will also take the place of the Regional Waste and Resource Recovery Groups across the state.

Victoria also introduced a circular economy policy in 2020 named Recycling Victoria: A New Economy. This aims to increase and improve recycling and resource recovery in Victoria as well as closing the loop through encouraging and developing markets for the recycled materials.

As a direct result of the recent policy updates in Victoria some changes to Council’s waste management services are being mandated by the State Government. For example, by 2027 Council’s must provide residents with a separate glass recycling service (either kerbside bin or drop off) and by 2030 residents must have access to a FOGO (Food and garden waste) service (either kerbside bin or drop off). In 2023 Victoria also plans to introduce a Container Deposit Scheme (CDS) to encourage the recycling of eligible beverage containers.



Council is currently working with the Gippsland Waste and Resource Recovery Group and other Gippsland Councils to implement a series of collaborative tenders for the provision of various waste management services including:

- Organics processing;
- Recycling processing (including glass);
- Residual material disposal;
- Kerbside collection and transport.

This work will be a significant focus over the next few years as current contracts expire and new contracts are entered into. Although the intent of participating in these collaborative tender processes is to achieve cost efficiencies and service improvements, a final decision on whether or not to enter into regional contracts will not be able to be made until tender processes are completed.

3.3 Previous Work

Council adopted a Waste Management Strategy (WMS) in 2016 to guide the implementation and improvement of waste management services and to ensure those services into the future met the communities needs and complied with legislative requirements.

The desired outcomes of the WMS have been achieved, with most actions implemented including the following key activities:

- Upgrade transfer station infrastructure to ensure that safe and effective management of waste and recyclables is maintained;
- Construct new landfill cells to ensure airspace is always available for the disposal of non-recyclable waste;
- Operate the Koonwarra Landfill and progressively rehabilitate filled landfill cells in accordance with EPA requirements;
- Investigate the viability of introducing a FOGO Collection Service;
- Pursue collaborative tendering with other Gippsland councils for the provision of waste management services; and
- Expand the public place recycling bin network.

In general terms, the work undertaken to implement the WMS has achieved the desired outcomes. Service changes such as the introduction of an annual hard rubbish collection and the introduction of a kerbside green waste collection service have provided accessible services to the community and reduced waste to landfill. Service improvements at the Koonwarra Landfill include the introduction of a tarp based daily cover system which has increased the expected lifespan of the landfill by up to 4 years and the installation of a landfill gas flare which has reduced the site's environmental impact by decreasing the amount of harmful greenhouse gases emitted to the atmosphere.

3.4 Aims and Goals

The current WMS is undergoing a review, the outcomes of which will inform the development of a new Waste Management Plan (WMP) to guide the implementation of waste management services into the future.

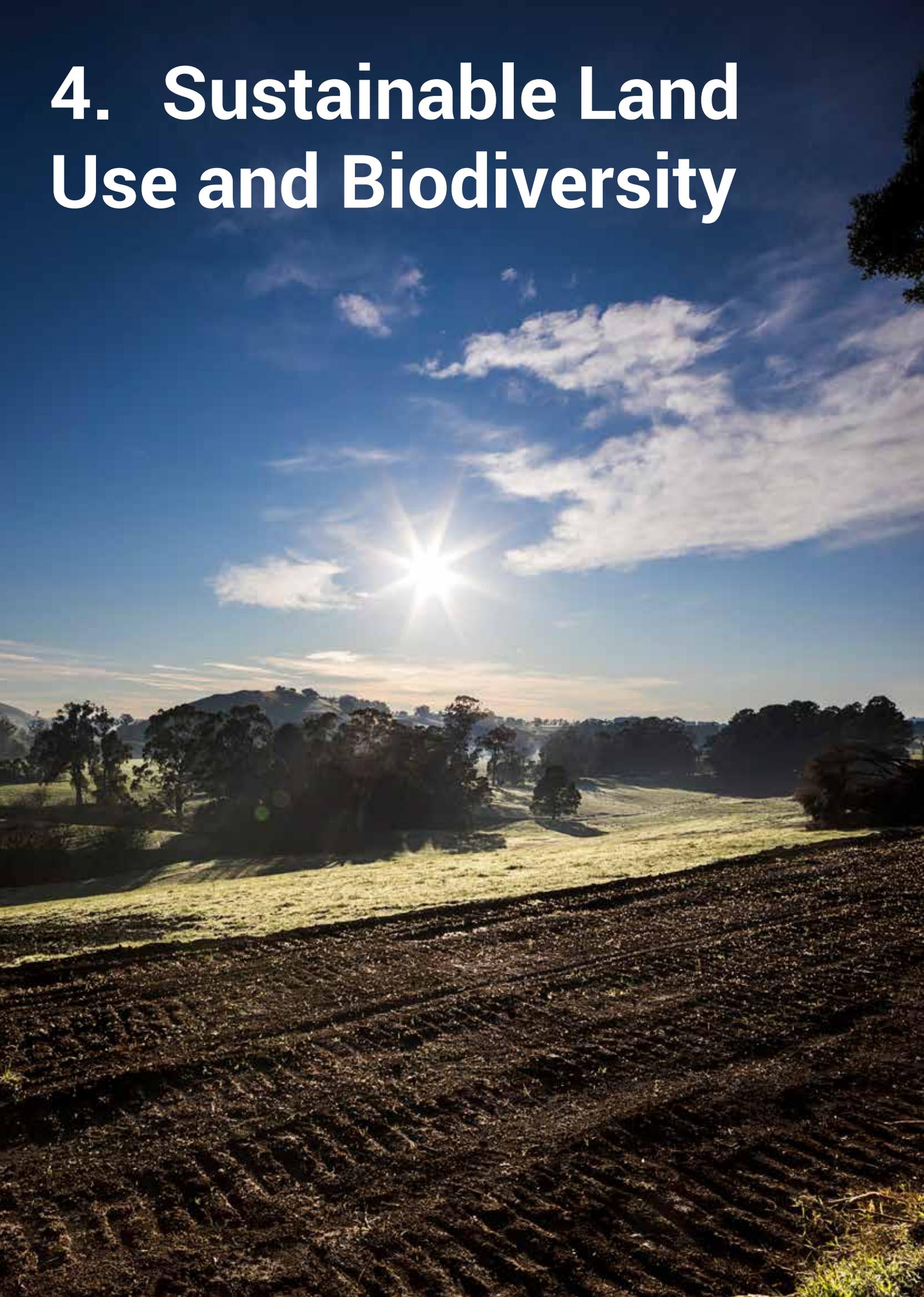
A key focus of the new WMP will be to continue to develop initiatives and implement actions that increase the recovery of materials for recycling and reduce the disposal of waste to landfill.

Key drivers for the WMP will be the outcomes of regional collaborative tender processes and the influences of new legislation as it is rolled out at State and Federal level.

Although the review of the current WMS is at a preliminary stage, it is apparent that the new WMP will need to include specific activities to:

- Identify alternative options for the cost-effective disposal of non-recyclable waste or extend the Koonwarra Landfill to ensure the waste disposal needs of the South Gippsland community continue to be met;
- Continue to manage the effective recycling of materials such as e-Waste, organics, plastics, glass, metals, paper/cardboard etc; and
- Ensure flexibility is maintained in service contracts to enable changes to be made to service delivery in response to external influences without incurring additional, unsustainable cost increases.

4. Sustainable Land Use and Biodiversity



4.1 Background

The protection of South Gippsland's biodiversity is critical for our survival. Biodiversity provides food for people and animals, materials such as timber and natural fibres, medicines, chemicals and genetic material. Biodiversity ensures the maintenance of ecological process including the maintenance of water quality within catchments, protecting soil fertility, the cycling of nutrients, weather moderation, pollination of crops, pest control and storing carbon emissions. A biodiverse South Gippsland is a productive, healthy and sustainable South Gippsland.

Sustainable land use is the backbone of the protection of ecosystems and biodiversity. Whether it be through Council's strategic planning and the implementation of the Planning Scheme, via our ongoing work maintaining and enhancing our bush reserves, or through the retention of native flora and fauna across the shire and the control of invasive species, Council has an active role in the sustainable use of land and the retention of biodiversity across the municipality.

4.2 Outside Influences/Context

Planning and Environment Act 1987 (Vic)

The Planning and Environment Act 1987 (Vic) provides a planning framework that supports environmental and sustainability outcomes including the principles of:

- a) Sustainable land use and development
- b) The protection of biodiversity and natural resources, the protection of ecological processes.

Some clauses deal specifically with planning responses to hazards such as bushfire, flood, erosion and heat.

4.3 Previous Work

Council has long undertaken work to ensure the sustainable use of land and protect the biodiversity of the municipality. Council's Environment Team actively manages Shire roadsides, bush reserves and the Great Southern Rail Trail to prevent habitat loss, primarily from invasive weed species. Council has developed a roadside weed control plan that aims to strategically manage roadside weeds on an ongoing basis with the objective of protecting South Gippsland's roadside biodiversity values and agricultural assets in to the future.

Through Council's strategic planning, we have maintained an active watch on sustainable land use through actions including the recent development of an updated Coastal Strategy; the endorsement of a planning scheme amendment recognising the potential increased sea level rise resulting from climate change, and the associated study into the suitability of Council's existing sea walls. Council strives to prevent habitat loss through the effective implementation of the South Gippsland Planning Scheme, specifically the native vegetation removal regulations. The retention of habitat is critical to the protection of South Gippsland's biodiversity.



4.4 Aims and Goals

Council will continue to work towards protecting the biodiversity of the region through active ecosystem protection and sustainable land use planning and practices. Working with private landowners, or on land that council directly manages, Council will act to reduce the impacts of land use practices on habitat and biodiversity loss.

Council aims to work with new community members to educate around the importance of weed and pest management.

Council will continue to work collaboratively with the Community and other natural resources management agencies to prevent further habitat loss and to establish strategic wildlife corridors to maintain genetic diversity, with our vegetation team retaining large trees, where safe and practical, whether dead or alive, for habitat purposes for arboreal mammals, birds and wildlife.

Council will ensure that productive farming land is protected through application of the South Gippsland Planning Scheme. Council will look to work with developers around offset tree and vegetation planting practices when going through planning applications.

Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD) is now being included in planning schemes across Victoria, with the concept gaining traction as the benefits are realised by developers and property owners. Council can send clear signals to developers and builders about expectations when it comes to designing and constructing new building stock in South Gippsland, and continue to advocate for the further adoption of ESD principles in the Victorian Planning Scheme.

Council will promote the incorporation of Water Sensitive Urban Design principles into developments and when upgrading public infrastructure and assets, ensuring the use of appropriate placement and maintenance of infrastructure, including roads, bridges, drains, soil & conservations features to minimise land degradation.