



Place-based case study

King Island Sustainable Futures Program



August 2009



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| PROGRAM NAME |  |
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| TPOLOGY | <p>State Government, Local Government, Industry</p> |
| KEY STAKEHOLDERS | <p>Village Green</p>  <p>Village Green Environmental Solutions P/L AUSTRALIA IRELAND MALAYSIA UNITED STATES</p> <p>http://www.villagegreen.com.au/html/s01_home/home.asp</p> <p>Village Green Environmental Solutions was the appointed service provider in small business assessment and mentoring.¹</p> <p>The Dept of Environment, Parks, Heritage and the Arts (CleanBiz program)</p>  |

¹ King Island Sustainable Futures Final Report, Village Green Environmental Solutions.

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| | <p>King Island Council</p>  <p>Local energy supplier Hydro Tasmania.</p>  <p>Hydro Tasmania <i>the renewable energy business</i></p> |
| <p>FUNDING PARTNERS</p> | <p>King Island Sustainable Futures, initially a 12 month program delivered between August 2007 and August 2008 (extended to November 2008), was a joint initiative between:</p> <p>The Dept of Environment, Parks, Heritage and the Arts (CleanBiz program)</p>  <p>King Island Council</p>  <p>Local business National Foods (King Island Dairy)</p>  <p>And Local energy supplier Hydro Tasmania.</p>  <p>Hydro Tasmania <i>the renewable energy business</i></p> |

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| <p>BRIEF PROJECT DESCRIPTION</p> | <p>King Island Sustainable Futures represented 31 commercial (making up 40 % of King Island businesses) and non-commercial enterprises who were encouraged to adopt a more resource efficient approach to business, focusing on optimising energy, water, chemical and transport use to reduce wastes and cut operating costs.</p> <p>The participants' initial task was to develop a 'brand' (name and logo), to give them a sense of identity and to compliment the strong King Island brand. Following this, each enterprise participated in a broad sustainability assessment (audit) to establish current sustainability performance and set recommendations. Workshops followed, providing individual enterprises with information, advice and management tools about how to improve their triple bottom line performance. A second sustainability assessment, conducted some months afterwards, allowed enterprises to evaluate changes in their performance. Five enterprises were recognised for their outstanding sustainability actions during the program across Environmental, Economic, Social and Cultural categories, with one enterprise receiving the Local Champion Award for being the best performer across all sustainability categories.</p> |
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Background

King Island is located in Bass Strait, halfway between Tasmania and Victoria. King Island poses several sustainability challenges, not least being its distance from easily accessible and local produce and resources including networking opportunities and environmentally efficient technologies. Costs relating to freight, transportation and flights and customs protocols pose challenges to the island's business practices.² King Island Sustainable Futures recognised a need to build the capacity of the island's sustainable business management practices.

A number of variables favoured creation of a sustainable business initiative for the island. King Island Council was committed to carbon neutrality for the island, Peter Boyer (one of Al Gore's Tasmanian Climate Change Ambassadors) had spoken with the community about climate change and shown An Inconvenient Truth and the local high school was incorporating more sustainability principles into its curriculum. There were also a number of businesses already engaged in resource efficiency, plus a ready, enthusiastic pool of collaborators to sponsor and oversee the initiative.

The initiative offered participants a good opportunity to be seen as a 'can do' (business) community and provide a valuable foil to the renowned King Island brand. While a business-

² King Island Sustainable Futures Final Report, Village Green Environmental Solutions, p4.

based program, there were benefits to the wider community as well given that most business owners and operators reside on the island.

Minister for Environment, Parks, Heritage and the Arts, Michelle O'Byrne, said 'the program is a result of CleanBiz, King Island Council, National Foods and Hydro Tasmania coming together to help create a grass roots initiative to stimulate and progress new ideas and to educate local enterprises about the concepts of sustainability.'ⁱ

Implementation and approach

The funding partners and stakeholders were the drivers in delivering King Island Sustainable Futures at a substantially subsidised cost to the participating enterprises. A 'commitment fee' of \$50 was charged to small enterprises with less than 10 full time employees, rising to \$300 for enterprises with more than 20 full time employees. A 300m² assessment limitation was allocated or in cases where an indicative assessment was warranted, the area/s of highest resource use (such as kitchens and restrooms), were allocated.³

After the recruitment stage, surveys canvassing a variety of triple bottom line aspects were distributed to all signed-up enterprises and the group set about creating its 'identity'. The proposed name and logo and other promotional material (e.g. window stickers) displaying the program brand were distributed to all program participants to encourage ownership of the brand.⁴

Around the same time, enterprises became involved in face-to-face consultations with Village Green Environmental Solutions (Village Green) staff. Participants provided billing information to Village Green for electricity, gas and water use and (where relevant) for waste removal over a typical 12 month period. Where this information was not available, average calculations based on audits conducted on similar businesses were made. An initial on-site sustainability assessment, where more in-depth data was collected about energy, water and waste practices was then followed by a comparative assessment to measure performance changes over the course of the program.

Between assessments, each enterprise was encouraged to implement their top few recommendations, such as switching off appliances not in use (or installing timers), consolidating refrigeration systems and installing energy efficient lighting. Encouragement was in the form of group workshops, where information, tools and tips about resource efficient principles and practices were discussed; phone and email conversations between collaborators (including Village Green) and participants plus informal business-2-business activities. During this period the Minister for Environment, Parks, Heritage and the Arts Michelle O'Byrne visited the island to launch the initiative and show her personal support for King Island Sustainable Futures.

³ King Island Sustainable Futures Final Report, Village Green Environmental Solutions, p8.

⁴ King Island Sustainable Futures Final Report, Village Green Environmental Solutions, p14.



courtesy of King Island Courier 19 March 2008

Image:

Damien Blackwell, Industry Liaison Officer, CleanBiz, with native seedlings, courtesy of the island's native plant nursery, 'The Frogshack', which were given to visitors of the King Island Sustainable Futures display at the King Island Show, to assist in carbon offsetting initiatives. The King Island Show engaged Sustainable Futures Program participants and other members of the community focusing a broad spectrum of sustainability initiatives.

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Program initiatives

The greatest strength of King Island Sustainable Futures has been its ability to draw in and focus discussion on a variety of sustainability issues already prominent in the minds of many in the island's business community. The program provided a practical framework in which many of the existing ideas to help improve business sustainability, such as generating more renewable energy, reducing energy use and eliminating plastic bags could be explored.

For example, prior to King Island Sustainable Futures, staff and students at the district high school had been working to integrate more sustainability principles and concepts into the curriculum. School students were also at the forefront of efforts to make the island free of plastic bags. The school's involvement in the program acted as a catalyst to these initiatives, which ultimately lead to their Culture award.

Tangible benefits in terms of energy and water savings were also realised by many of the participating enterprises. In several cases these benefits occurred through simple changes to behaviour, such as more conscious effort to switch off or limit the use of devices, while others were due to rationalising appliances, like using two commercial refrigerators rather than three. The quantity of materials sent to landfill by participants also reduced, which also had a positive effect on lowering greenhouse gas emissions.

While the magnitude of the financial savings was moderate, for micro and small businesses (which prevail on King Island) even a few hundred dollars saved each year from the bottom line is welcome. Furthermore, the savings are likely to grow in size as enterprises continue to implement their sustainability recommendations over time. It is also important to remember that

the relatively short period between assessments (~two months) limited enterprises' ability to pursue more than a few of many recommended actions prior to the next assessment.

The essential plus for participants in King Island Sustainable Futures is that enterprises now have a greater awareness and understanding of "sustainability" and how to make meaningful changes to the 'business as usual' model. Participants have gained useful information and tools, formed new or strengthened existing business relations and acquired new skills to continue with sustainability actions beyond the program period.

Results/project proponent perceptions

The total annualised amount of greenhouse gas emissions avoided by program participants totalled about 23 tonnes (an average of less than 1 tonne per business). There were small water savings of approximately 2kL per business, per annum, and combined financial savings averaged about \$400 per business, per annum.⁵ The group also reduced the quantity of waste materials to landfill by about 20 tonnes per annum.

Whilst difficult to quantify, King Island Sustainable Futures had the benefits of boosting the King Island brand and economic development by providing facilities for promotion of King Island as a 'greener' tourist destination. The branding of the program enabled local ownership, encouraged third party support, fostered partnerships and communicated the program benefits to the larger community.⁶

Enterprises have enhanced their profile by working to meet growing consumer demands of business for improved sustainable practices.

Education campaigns also provide additional benefits by raising awareness and improving behavioural change beyond businesses to individuals within the wider community.⁷

King Island Mayor Charles Arnold stated 'we are a very remote location with a small population that relies greatly on imports. We know it is critical that our community, especially our civic and business leaders, develop and foster strategies that can optimise our use of resources for the benefit of the entire island.'ⁱⁱ

⁵ King Island Sustainable Futures Group B Report for King Island Sustainable Futures, Village Green Environmental Solutions, p5.

⁶ King Island Sustainable Futures Final Report, Village Green Environmental Solutions, p14.

⁷ King Island Sustainable Futures Group B Report for King Island Sustainable Futures, Village Green Environmental Solutions, p25.

Conclusion

While King Island Sustainable Futures was a positive experience for most participants, several factors did constrain the full potential of the program, including:

- Delays to preparation and release of assessments. This had the effect of reducing the timeframe for business actions between the A and B assessments and therefore the magnitude of savings
- The loss of Village Green personnel during the course of the program.
- The often generic nature of assessment reports
- The inability to find a winning formula to secure participants' attendance at workshops
- Low return rate of evaluation surveys

It is important to recognise and debate such program constraints, in order to learn and improve similar place-based initiatives.

Fundamentally the initiative was really the first, coordinated step in a more sustainable direction for the island's business community. There is a real need for strong, engaged and local ownership and leadership to help previous participating enterprises optimise their program experiences and draw in other local businesses.

King Island Sustainable Futures provided capacity building opportunities for small and medium enterprises by:

- building networks within the local community and enhancing community engagement and sense of place;
- fostering partnerships between King Island communities and mainland community, business and government representatives;
- analysing individual business' material input and output, including substance and waste flows and ecological footprint and minimising the processing flow;
- educating business owners and employees on operational costs, sustainable productivity, business viability and profitability;
- facilitating the role of technology and consumption as a powerful leverage in enabling cleaner production methods and practices and sustainable development of businesses and business practices;
- facilitating eco-efficiency and environmental management concepts within businesses;
- improving triple bottom line performance (environmental, socio-cultural and economic); communicating the benefits of sustainable business operations to the broader community.⁸

⁸ King Island Sustainable Futures Final Report, Village Green Environmental Solutions.

⁸ The Advocate, 28 May 2008, Vol 24 No. 27, 'KI embraces sustainable future'.

⁸ King Island Courier, 28 May 2008, 'Sustainability given the tick of approval', p5.

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