

# SECTION TWO

## STEPS INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING A LOCAL AGENDA 21 PROGRAM







## 2.1 GETTING STARTED

- ✓ make a commitment at a policy and budgetary level to undertake a LA21 program
- ✓ create a climate of support and awareness of what LA21 is about
- ✓ set in place the decision-making structure and processes to facilitate the program with full community participation.



### Helpful Hint

A commitment to undertaking a LA21 could be initiated by recommending that the Council declare its support of the *Newcastle Declaration* and/or formally join the South Australian *Partnership for Local Agenda 21*. For more information contact the LGA's Environment Resource Officer or DEHAA's LA21 Coordinator.

### Helpful Hint

Alexandrina Council and the Cities of Adelaide, Burnside, Marion, Playford and Whyalla all created new environmental officer/LA21 positions as part of their LA21 programs. The job descriptions for these positions provide a useful insight into how the positions have operated and been developed.

## ✓ Establishing Council commitment

Generally in South Australia, the momentum to develop a LA21 has come from a Council's strategic planning processes. These processes have shown that an environmental policy framework is needed to ensure that environmental considerations are balanced with economic and social factors in the formulation and delivery of the Council's services.

Some Councils have appointed a designated LA21 project officer or environmental officer to ensure that the program is well coordinated. Other Councils have allocated the responsibility to existing staff, particularly planners and/or environmental health officers. Whichever option is used, someone must be given the responsibility to coordinate the program. The position of this person in the organisation depends on the Council's structure. However, the officer needs to have reporting links to senior management to ensure that the LA21 program is a whole of organisation initiative and is effectively integrated with the Council's strategic, corporate and financial planning process.

## ✓ Creating a climate of support

Once a commitment to develop a LA21 has been made, the Council and community need to be given the opportunity to fully understand and accept the concept. This 'preplanning period' is crucial if a LA21 program is to make long term changes that lead to local sustainability. Organisational and community commitment is fundamental to the success of the program.

### City of Happy Valley - laying the groundwork

In 1995 the City of Happy Valley (now part of the City of Onkaparinga) embarked upon a process to prepare a Local Environment Plan under the LA21 framework. In the six-month preplanning period it:

- reviewed the approaches of other Councils and formulated an approach
- briefed all staff and elected members on the proposal and identified and considered their concerns
- established a Steering Committee to oversee this process and to develop terms of reference.

Subsequently an Environmental Advisory Committee (based on the successful City of Burnside model) was established with representation of elected members, staff and the community.

The Mayor was appointed as chair of the Committee and all salaried department heads were appointed to the Committee. The Committee was responsible for interviewing and selecting community representatives from those who responded to advertisements in the local press. Applicants were considered against a formal job specification and a youth representative was appointed to the committee in recognition of the 'young' population profile of the area.



The Environment Advisory Committee operated by using consensus for making decisions and used the services of a facilitator for the first eight months. Formal minutes of Committee proceedings were taken to create a set of public documents that are available for public scrutiny.

The emphasis placed on preplanning was in recognition that LA21 was a genuine long-term process.

After the initial discussion, the Council could refer the matter to an existing Committee or staff member to report back on how to develop a LA21 program in the Council area. Alternatively, a project officer could be employed to complete this element of the program.

The report can address:

- the context in which the process fits, ie the Council's overall strategic and corporate planning frameworks and other related Council processes and initiatives
- the mechanisms and strategies to be used to ensure community participation in the development and implementation of the program
- terms of reference for an advisory committee to guide the program
- the composition of, and appointments to, the advisory committee including elected member, staff and community representation
- staff support and responsibilities
- budget allocation
- links to other Council processes
- an initial time-line for completing stages in the overall program.

The time and methods for researching and drafting the report will vary between Councils. Some Councils have employed project officers for the job, others have relied upon existing staff.

### **City of Burnside - maintaining awareness about why sustainability is important**

Since launching its LA21 plan in 1995 the City of Burnside has had excellent success in implementing key strategies derived from the plan. These have included a comprehensive reform of the domestic kerbside collection system and the establishment of a dedicated Biodiversity Unit headed by a Parks and Biodiversity Manager.

The Council identified that it is important to ensure that Council staff and community members do not lose sight of the reason why these changes and initiatives are occurring.

In 1998 the City of Burnside initiated a comprehensive environmental awareness program - launched as the next cultural change initiative for Council. All 120 Council staff (including all outdoor staff and senior

#### **Helpful Hint**

In the preplanning period it is useful to draw upon the experiences and expertise of Councils that have begun a LA21 program. Presentation by people involved in the program or the LA21 Coordinator (DEHAA) and/or the Environment Resource Officer (LGA) will provide a useful insight into how LA21 programs have been developed elsewhere.

#### **Helpful Hint**

In this early preplanning phase consider whether there are any opportunities to undertake LA21 programs in cooperation with neighbouring Councils. A regional LA21 approach could allow resource sharing and help the Council address cross boundary issues such as catchment management issues, transport planning, air quality and biodiversity conservation.



### Helpful Hint

The Cities of Adelaide, Burnside, Marion and Whyalla have all developed terms of reference to direct the activities of their LA21 committees.

## City of Burnside *(continued)*

management) participated in a three-part program over the course of three months. The program addressed key environmental issues and the concepts and principles of ecologically sustainable development.

The program did not give technical training but focused on values, cultural understanding and ecological concepts. It aimed to develop a common language across the whole organisation and to enable individuals to develop a personal meaning for environmental concepts and issues and thereby their own commitment to the LA21 program.

The program highlighted that while commitments to environmental issues were gained during the early planning phase of the LA21 program, maintaining and building on that commitment is an ongoing process. Burnside's experience lends support to the notion that the LA21 process is not linear or short-term, but rather cyclical and evolving.



### Setting in place decision-making structures and processes

An essential ingredient of any LA21 program is that from inception it allows for the full participation of the community in any decision-making processes.

#### *Establish an advisory committee*

Having made a decision to commit to a LA21 program and develop a framework the next step is to establish an advisory committee or steering committee to guide the development and implementation of the process for the long term. Whatever the approach taken, experience shows that the membership is best drawn from a mix of senior Council staff, elected members and community representatives with balanced representation from each group.

#### *Allocate resources*

At the start, resources that need to be allocated to help the LA21 planning process include:

- administration costs for the advisory committee
- staff resources
- printing costs for discussion papers and publicity
- production of promotional materials or events
- support for community initiatives.

Set the time-frame for recommendations arising from the LA21 planning processes to coincide with the Council's annual budget deliberations and strategic planning time-frames.

Funding for all stages of a LA21 program could be gained from a number of sources other than Council's budget, for example:



- Natural Heritage Trust funding programs
- catchment management boards and programs reliant on local area planning processes to ensure Local Government and community involvement in catchment management
- resource sharing arrangements with neighbouring Councils or regional bodies.

## **Allocating resources to LA21**

Resources are an important part of implementing a commitment to LA21.

The level of resources allocated to LA21 can vary depending on the Council's existing staffing and resources available for transfer to the process.

The Cities of Burnside and Marion had environmental officers who were able to incorporate the LA21 into their work schedule.

The City of Whyalla in making a commitment to LA21 agreed to the appointment of a specific officer to coordinate the process.

The Cities of Adelaide and Happy Valley incorporated the work into existing staff roles then later made a specific additional appointment.

The District Council of Streaky Bay made a small budget allocation to costs and allocated other tasks and coordination into existing staffing arrangements.

2.1

### ***Maintain mechanisms for community involvement***

As well as involving the community in the advisory structure, there are many ways to keep the community informed of and involved in the program. Try:

- preparing a media release about the decision to undertake LA21 planning
- developing a newsletter for distribution within the community with the latest news
- creating a LA21 community network serviced with regular mailouts and invitations to join LA21 working groups or attend workshops
- organising special events within the community, for example celebrate World Environment Day
- targeting schools with a logo competition
- releasing a discussion paper about the LA21 that can be used as a basis for written responses by staff and community members who wish to make submissions to participate in the program
- writing a regular column in the local newspaper.

An advantage of these initiatives is that Council staff and the community all become equally familiar from the outset with the concepts of LA21 planning and are learning 'a common language' that promotes an understanding of ecologically sustainable development.



## **City of Happy Valley - keeping the community informed**

The City of Happy Valley put in place a range of measures to keep the community informed of the LA21 process, including:

- a Council sponsored, community-wide logo and poster competition with special prizes for school entries
- an evening workshop for elected members, appointed community representatives and other members of the community to identify key issues and priorities
- Community Environmental Awards and grants program for local groups
- a regular feature in the Council's own community newsletter
- a network of interested community members who receive regular mail-outs with updates on the process.

All of these factors helped to involve the community and to reinforce the Council's commitment to fulfilling its environmental responsibilities.



## 2.2 SETTING THE PRIORITIES

- ✓ jointly define (Council and community) a vision of what sustainability will mean to the area in the long term and what priority issues need to be addressed to achieve the vision
- ✓ assess what the Council and community are already doing or need to do to address these issues
- ✓ draft policy statements, management plans and action plans, which are integrated with the Councils corporate and strategic planning process and linked with other community environmental initiatives



## setting priorities

### Helpful Hint

Before starting a LA21 program many Councils and/or communities may have already developed visions and priorities for the future as part of other planning processes, for example in local area planning, catchment planning and in the overall strategic planning of Council. Ensure that the outcomes of these planning processes are incorporated into the LA21 program.



## Creating a vision and identifying priority environmental issues

A community and Council vision for the future helps to frame the LA21 process. Through community workshops, ask community members, Council staff and elected members to articulate their vision 10 years and beyond. Then draw up a composite vision and use it as a basis for further discussion.

Don't forget to determine some guiding principles on how the Council and community are to work together in the LA21 program. This approach allows the community to define how they are to be consulted and involved in the program.

### City of Burnside - building community ownership

In 1992 the City of Burnside embarked on an extensive and consultative community-based process to develop the Burnside Enviroplan, a broad strategy for sustainable management in the city.

Burnside is now moving into Phase II with a greater emphasis on the connection between local and global issues and is:

- re-establishing an Environment Advisory Committee as an official Council committee
- placing greater emphasis on strategic planning
- implementing key initiatives identified in the Enviroplan.

Once an agreed vision has been defined the next step is to identify the priority environmental and sustainability concerns that the Council has to deal with and the community is aware of or concerned about, through consultation with the elected members, staff and the wider community. Community consultation provides the opportunity for the community to raise new issues of environmental concern and to gain an understanding of Council operations.

Different consultation methods can be used including:

- workshops and public meetings
- focus groups
- surveys and questionnaires distributed to local residents
- articles in the local media and Council publications
- discussion papers
- information flyers
- door to door interviews
- public stalls at local events.

## City of Marion - setting priorities

In 1995 the City of Marion went through a integrated local area planning (ILAP) process for identifying strategic issues including a number of priority environmental issues, but did not have a environmental policy framework or action plan in which to link its initiatives. The LA21 was intended to bridge this gap. The issues previously identified formed the basis of the LA21 planning and involved:

- considering what had been done since 1995 to achieve the goals and strategic issues identified
- reviewing the list of issues to see whether the issues are still relevant to present day circumstance
- identifying new issues and priorities.

The outcomes of the various consultation methods were synthesised into an ‘issues and ideas for action’ paper which was circulated for further comment and then used as the basis of developing an action plan around the priority issues.

### Helpful Hint

The Cities of Adelaide and Marion have produced State of the Environment reports, each of which details a number of environmental and sustainability indicators that have been developed by the Councils to measure the effectiveness of their respective LA21s in improving the quality of the local environment.



### Assessing the current situation

The next step is to determine what the Council and community is already doing about environmental management and sustainability issues. This includes assessing the organisational and operational structure of the Council so that the key environmental management and sustainability issues affecting each organisational unit can be identified.

LA21 programs don’t have to start from scratch. Review what the Council and community is already doing that could be incorporated in the LA21 program.

It is at this point in the process that the role of LA21 as the umbrella strategic framework for all sustainability and environmental initiatives and issues needs to be reinforced. For example, existing initiatives of Council such as revegetation projects, Cities for Climate Protection campaigns, catchment management projects and Coastcare, Landcare, Bushcare and Rivercare projects are all integral elements of a LA21 program.

Some LA21 Councils have initiated a State of the Environment (SOE) report at this stage of their LA21 program, others have left the SOE reporting exercise until after the policies and action plan have been completed. A SOE report completed early on in the program can be used to provide baseline information for measuring the effectiveness of the LA21 in achieving environmental outcomes over time (see Section 2.4 for more information on SOE reporting).



## setting priorities

### Helpful Hint

A recurring issue for strategic planning is the perception that a focus on planning activity impedes on the ground initiatives. The approach to LA21 planning proposed in these guidelines allows for strategic planning activity to run concurrently with on the ground projects and initiatives. The long-term viability of a LA21 program relies upon a clear demonstration of how policy and practice are interdependent.



## Preparing Local Agenda 21 policies and action plans

All of the work undertaken to this point sets the stage for a strategic action plan which:

- expresses the Council and community vision
- highlights the priority issues
- assesses the current situation
- sets out the aims, strategies and actions
- links with other Council activities
- provides a framework for implementation and monitoring.

Action plans provide a format for achieving a particular aim or set of aims. In the case of a LA21 the aims are intended to enhance the Council's own performance and should facilitate cooperation between the Council and its community.

### *Establish working groups*

The interconnectedness of environmental issues means that it is difficult to deal with priority issues in isolation. For example, the loss of biodiversity is a land management issue, an air quality issue, a water quality issue, a cultural heritage issue and a resource management issue. Councils have therefore tended to group issues differently in their LA21 plans as shown in the table below.

This step in the process requires a dedicated amount of research and work. Try breaking down this workload into workable 'bite size chunks' by establishing specific working groups for each issue.

Working groups could be set up by dividing up the membership of the existing advisory/steering committee or by seconding other interested and informed people. Maintain a balance of elected members, staff and community representatives on the working groups. The lifetime of the groups will vary depending on the nature of each program.

City of Adelaide	City of Marion	City of Happy Valley	City of Whyalla	D.C. Streaky Bay
Movement and access Buildings and community Environmental quality Resource management Natural environment City administration	Water management Coastal management Biodiversity Waste management Built environment Environmental education City administration	Environmental education City administration Environmental education Water quality Biological diversity Better use of resources Rural land management Open space Heritage and built environment Corporate administration	Biodiversity and land management Coastal and marine Energy Pollution and waste Water Council operations Education	Coastal management Native vegetation Built environment



## Working groups - exploring the details

The City of Adelaide LA21 was overseen by a Steering Unit comprising four elected Councillors, three staff representatives, two State Government officers and two community representatives. The Steering Committee reported to the Council. In addition, four community reference groups were established for:

- clean and healthy city
- natural environment and open space
- buildings and streets
- resources, energy and waste.

Each group included three Council staff with responsibility in the specific area and community representatives. All four groups met at least four times over five months and each of them considered:

- clarifying the process of an environmental management plan
- clarifying what is meant by sustainability
- establishing a vision for a Sustainable City
- proposing indicators for sustainability
- proposing actions required to move towards sustainability
- setting priorities and responsibilities for the programs.

The views of the reference groups were fed back to the Steering Unit.

### *Undertake research*

Ensure that each working group is well informed by gathering relevant information such as:

- existing Council policy or plans on the issue
- examples from other Councils
- initiatives being undertaken by the local community, including the activities of local industry and businesses
- relevant catchment management plans, local area plans, soil conservation plans and other locally/regionally based sustainability and/or natural resource management strategies
- State and Commonwealth policy
- technical information on the issue.

### *Determine aims and strategies*

Aims are specific statements of intent, indicating what the Council wishes to achieve through its LA21 program in both the short and long term. Strategies indicate the broad mechanism through which the Council intends to achieve each particular aim. Generally these can then be broken down into specific actions.

### Helpful Hint

To ensure that this stage of the program is well coordinated it is best that all working groups meet regularly, have clear terms of reference and report to the steering/advisory committee. Keep working groups at a minimum to avoid an administrative overload.



## setting priorities

### *Integrate with other Council plans*

When developing the LA21 aims, policies and strategies, it is important to ensure that they reflect and inform the Council's existing strategic or corporate plan and planning processes. There is, for example, no value in the Advisory Committee preparing recommendations for the Council's vehicles to be converted to LPG when the fleet replacement program started a month ago! This integration with other Council policy and planning processes is especially important for ensuring that the monitoring and evaluation of the LA21 program is integrated with the strategic and corporate planning processes so it becomes an integral part of that wider process. Therefore review the LA21 plan at the same time as the review of the Council's corporate and strategic plan and any other major planning or review processes.

#### **Local Agenda 21 - environment planning or corporate planning**

LA21, with its emphasis on sustainability, requires environmental objectives to be linked to economic and social objectives: the LA21 process needs to become linked to the Council's corporate or strategic planning.

Ideally, over time they will take place together. The reality at present is that some Councils may not have strategic plans, some may not have environmental plans. Developing a LA21 can highlight the need for both.

The City of Salisbury adopted a Strategic Plan in 1994, which identify key environmental issues in Salisbury, and strategies to address them. In 1995 the Council formally accepted the challenge of Local Agenda 21, and using the Strategic Plan as a basis, prepared a State of the Environment Report and Environmental Management Plan. The EMP includes consideration of Council management practices and policies, and highlights the need for integration of corporate and environmental planning as the best way for the Council to successfully implement Local Agenda 21.

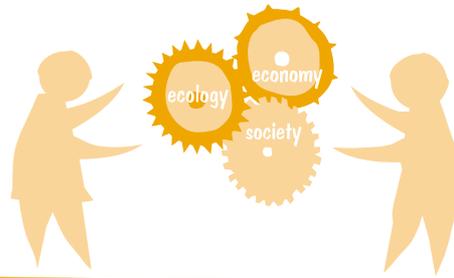
The City of Marion was able to directly link its draft LA21 into its strategic plan developed in 1995. This direct linking of LA21 planning strategies led to budgets and Council action plans which fitted with the Strategic Plan and other corporate activities.

### *Release draft plan for comment*

As with most strategic documents it is useful to formally release a draft LA21 and allow time for extensive community feedback. Inviting responses to the action plan in written form or through workshops to discuss either all or specific parts of the plan will give:

- greater community input
- an opportunity to gain support from stakeholders affected by the action plan
- an opportunity to integrate with the policies of neighbouring Councils
- reality checks.

After appropriate feedback from the community has been incorporated the action plan can be submitted to Council for formal endorsement and implementation.



# implementation

## 2.3 IMPLEMENTATION

- ✓ build on existing initiatives
- ✓ establish systems to ensure that the plan is implemented, for example environmental management systems
- ✓ set up and continue partnerships to maintain the program in the long term



### **Building on existing initiatives**

Many Councils have started implementing elements of an LA21 program before they formally begin the program! This is because developing a LA21 does not mean starting from scratch but is an iterative process which builds upon the broad range of sustainability and environmental initiatives already being undertaken by South Australian Councils. Existing issue-specific policies and initiatives may already be in keeping with the objectives of LA21. For example, energy efficiency programs such as Whyalla's solar rebate scheme, or the Cities of Marion's and Mitcham's Pollution Prevention Project preceded LA21 programs in these Councils. Conversely, some initiatives will be a direct product of the LA21 program, such as the City of Burnside's significant tree and vegetation survey.

However, once the LA21 plan has been completed it should guide the implementation of the program. Ensure the plan itself contains the reporting and review processes necessary to keep the program on track.

#### **City of Marion - integrating actions across the Council to help implementation**

The City of Marion draft LA21 specifically highlighted the need to develop measures to ensure environmental management decisions are incorporated into the Council's existing business planning, financial planning and contracting processes.

For example, a policy statement precedes each of the priority areas considered in the LA21 plan. These policies have then been incorporated in the Council's Policy Manual. The policies therefore guide all Council decisions to ensure that environmental considerations are integrated in all Council operations and functions.

The Cities of Adelaide, Burnside and Marion now require that 'environmental considerations' be a standard feature of all reports to the Council. This means that the environmental implications of all Council decisions are addressed as early as possible in the decision-making process.



### **Establishing systems for implementing a Local Agenda 21 plan**

One of the most effective systems for implementing a LA21 plan is to ensure that all strategies and actions in the plan are incorporated into the annual business plans of the relevant departments/units. Thus the implementation of the plan, and involvement in the wider LA21 program, becomes a whole of organisation commitment and responsibility.

The establishment of a formal environmental management system (EMS) is another mechanism that an increasing number of Councils are using for implementing the operational elements of a LA21 plan.



## implementation

An EMS is not an environmental strategy or a LA21, rather it is a process that sets in place Council procedures and practices which ensure that LA21 strategies are systematically implemented.

The Australian Local Government Association has prepared a manual on EMS for Local Government based on compatibility with the International and Australian Standard ISO 14000 series. This process should include a review of Council operations that includes:

- investigation of particular areas of Council operations, the practices being used in them and the environmental impacts of these activities
- interview or survey of staff involved in those operations
- identification of the particular department of the Council, and the associated staff, with overall responsibility for the operations being assessed
- evaluation of the outcomes of those operations, perhaps over a period of time, to determine any connection between the operations and environmental consequences
- identification of the policies and procedures which need to be developed to minimise any impacts.

### Developing an environmental management system

The Cities of Adelaide and Marion have begun to develop EMSs as part of their broader LA21 programs, each Council adopting an approach that reflects its own operations and structure.

The City of Adelaide began its EMS in 1997-98 using the ten-stage process defined in the International and Australian Standard ISO 14000. Initially the system was used to deal with the issue of contaminated land but is now being used to deal with issues across the Corporation. The approach taken involves using the structures and reporting mechanisms of the existing Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) systems to include 'Environment'. Initially OHS representatives and committees were trained and assessed in house.

The City of Marion began its EMS process in 1998 with an environmental audit of its operations on a site by site basis. External consultants conducted the audit and in the final audit report detailed recommendations for the development of environmental policy and procedures to ensure Council's environmental performance achieved compliance with relevant legislation and continuously improved to meet best practice standards. The Council has subsequently negotiated an Environmental Improvement Agreement with the Environment Protection Agency as part of its overall EMS. The EMS model being adopted at the City of Marion was developed using the ALGA manual and the guidance provided in the ISO 14000 standard. The Council aims to have its system accredited under the standard.

#### Helpful Hint

Copies of the Australian Local Government Association's manual on developing EMS are available from its office in Canberra (see Section Three).



## Working in partnership

The concept of partnership underpins LA21. In the South Australian context the *Partnership for Local Agenda 21* has helped improve intergovernmental coordination and cooperation, particularly between DEHAA, the LGA and Local Government generally.

A Council's LA21 relies on a partnership and consensus between Councils and the community. Equally important are working partnerships with relevant agencies and bodies, for example, relevant State Government agencies, neighbouring Councils, regional boards, private sponsors and other LA21 Councils from SA, interstate and overseas.

Working in partnership:

- allows Councils to work regionally and cooperatively to address cross boundary environmental and sustainability issues such as catchment management, transport planning, air pollution
- improves Council's ability to access regionally focused Commonwealth and State funding initiatives
- provides opportunities for resources sharing arrangements to support specific projects
- increases the capacity of individual Councils to implement their LA21 programs.

### Council and the community - building partnerships

Responsibility for 'action' within the action plan should not rest solely with the Council but should reflect and build on the partnerships fostered during the planning stages.

For example, the Cities of Marion and Mitcham have continued to work in partnership with State Government agencies and local businesses through their Environmental Education Project. In a joint venture the Councils, the Patawalonga Catchment Water Management Board, the Murray Darling 2001 Project and the Environment Protection Agency, are educating local businesses about environmental issues and the benefits of cleaner production. By 1997 over 250 individual businesses had been visited and seven stormwater demonstration sites developed.

The project is part of a larger program to ensure that the mixed needs of the 4000 residents and 500 businesses in the residential/industrial interface areas of the Councils can be met.

These initiatives provide the basis for developing the ongoing relationship needed to balance community expectations, business needs and environmental outcomes. The balance of these factors is central to the LA21 process.



## 2.4 EVALUATION - REPORTING AND REVIEW MECHANISMS



set in place mechanisms and systems that ensure a long-term commitment to the monitoring, review and evaluation of the LA21 program, for example the use of SOE reporting.



## Reporting

To ensure that ongoing monitoring and evaluation occurs a mechanism for gathering data to meet reporting requirements should be put in place. Such reports should advise the Council of the following:

- progress on implementing the action plan
- factors affecting implementation of the action plan
- the appropriateness of the aims and action statements that the plan addressed
- any new recommendations regarding the action plan.

Ideally a report of this type should be presented every six months or at least yearly. If possible the reporting process should be an integral part of any existing corporate reporting process, for example, including an environmental component in the annual report. This reporting needs to be an integral part of any EMS if one is in place.

### City of Adelaide - tracking progress

When the City of Adelaide Environmental Management Plan was being developed, thought was given to the process of measuring the level of implementation and reporting on progress.

To ensure consistency in reporting, a framework has been established which requires the recording of information about budget implications, the level of activity for the reporting period and the proposed activity or target for the next six months. All actions listed in the plan are coded so progress can be tracked.

Consultation sessions held with staff responsible for implementing actions listed in the plan, helped them understand the process and addressed any areas of concern. An electronic database, accessible to all staff, gives easy access to relevant information and has a simple procedure for data entry.

### *State of the Environment reporting*

A very effective and increasingly used tool for reporting on the effectiveness of the LA21 program is State of the Environment (SOE) reporting. A SOE report is essentially a compilation of sustainability indicators that provide information on the state of the environment. This reporting mechanism used with selected indicators measures the effectiveness of the LA21 strategies and actions in achieving environmental improvements. An SOE is therefore very useful for benchmarking the performance of the LA21 program.

The indicators can show the:

- **pressure** on the environment
- **state** or condition of the environment
- **response** to the situation.



## City of Adelaide - developing sustainability indicators

During the LA21 consultation process the City of Adelaide asked each community reference group to suggest relevant indicators. A total of about 100 indicators were suggested.

Subsequently these indicators were examined and reviewed, and data sources were identified which could be used either to determine trends or act as a baseline.

Indicators were eliminated if they did not measure up to the criteria established, or if a better indicator could be found.

As part of the ongoing monitoring of the state of the environment the indicators will be updated and added to.

The key to effective SOE reporting is to identify sustainability indicators that are measurable, simple, cost effective; provide the information that the Council needs; and are consistent with indicators developed at a state and national level.

Sustainability indicators can be a very useful tool for measuring the progress of the Council towards sustainability. They are also a readily understandable means of describing to the community progress and areas for further action.

At this stage in the process, a SOE report can act as a valuable community education tool. It is also a means to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies and actions taken as part of a LA21 program.

## State of the Environment Reporting

Both the City of Adelaide and the City of Salisbury prepared SOE reports early in their LA21 process.

In both instances the SOE report comprised a broad statement of environmental issues in the Council area - rather than focusing on indicators. This is a common response for initial SOE reports and provides the necessary framework to allow for later identification of appropriate indicators.

The City of Salisbury used its SOE report as a mechanism for community discussion leading to the preparation of its LA21, for example, schools were asked to provide comments on the SOE report.

The City of Adelaide has since produced a second edition of its State of the Environment Report using a set of locally based indicators.

### Helpful Hint

A couple of very useful reference documents for developing indicators are the *South Australian State of the Environment Report (1998)* and the Commonwealth Government document *Environmental Indicators: For National State of the Environment Reporting: Community and Local Uses*.

### Helpful Hint

To ensure regular ongoing monitoring and reporting, stipulate in the LA21 plan when and how often the reporting and review of the plan and program is to occur. It would be advisable that both processes are planned to occur together.



## evaluation

### Helpful Hint

An annual review of the LA21 plan and program can then be used to determine what progress is being made and what actions need to take priority in the next financial year. Document the outcomes of the review and report them to Council with proposed priorities for the next financial year's budget allocations.

## State of the Environment Reporting *(continued)*

The City of Marion is developing a SOE report using the priority issues and strategies already identified in the Council's LA21 Environmental Policy and Action Plan. Local environmental pressure, state and response indicators have been developed and will be used to measure the effectiveness of the LA21 program in improving local environmental conditions. An SOE report is planned for every three years at which point the LA21 plan will be comprehensively reviewed.



### Review mechanisms

Establish a process for review of the action plan to:

- ensure that the focus remains relevant
- reassess priority areas
- assess progress to date
- re-affirm community partnerships
- set new targets
- ensure that the LA21 is fully integrated with the Councils ongoing corporate and strategic planning.

Ideally the review should once again be linked into broader strategic timetables of the Council, that is, the LA21 review should take place just before or concurrently with a strategic and corporate plan review and involve the wider community. Furthermore, the timing of the review should ensure that the outcomes of any EMS or SOE processes are able to inform any changes to the direction and priorities of the LA21 program and relevant elements of the Councils corporate and strategic plan.