



**Merri-bek**  
City Council

# Sustainability and Climate



Annual Achievement Report  
2022 / 23



## Contents



Summary	2
Partners & collaboration	3
Key achievements	4
Reducing carbon emissions	6
Climate emergency	8
Creating a climate resilient Merri-bek	14
Energy	16
Waste & litter	18
Transport	22
Water	30
Nature	32
Sustainable buildings	34

**Merri-bek City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Merri-bek.**

## Summary



This report outlines the key achievements in 2022/23 across sustainability strategy areas relevant to all themes of the Merri-bek 2021–31 Community Vision, and particularly Theme 1: 'An environmentally proactive Merri-bek':

*In 2031, Merri-bek is carbon neutral, embracing an entirely renewable energy system, innovative management of waste, and accessible active transport. We have a circular economy, energy-efficient housing, food security, and ample green spaces and canopy cover led by a well-informed proactive community. We are a community connected to Country with healthy flora and fauna, through protection of ecosystems.*

Key highlights have been drawn from across the following strategies, plans and policies:

Zero Carbon Merri-bek 2040 Framework  
& Climate Emergency Action Plan 2020 – 2025

Waste and Litter Strategy (W&LS) 2018 – 2022

Plastic Wise Policy 2019 – 2029

Integrated Water Management (IWM) Strategy 2040  
& IWM Action Plan 2020 – 2025

Environmentally Sustainable Design through the Planning Scheme

Merri-bek Local Environmentally Sustainable Design Planning Policy, Clause 15.02L

Sustainable (Council) Buildings Policy 2018 – 2023

Urban Heat Island Effect (UHIE) Action Plan 2016 – 2026

Merri-bek Nature Plan 2020 – 2024

Urban Forest Strategy 2017 – 2027

Food System Strategy 2017 – 2020

Merri-bek Integrated Transport Strategy 2019

Climate Risk Strategy 2022 and Foundational Action Plan 2023 – 2025

## Partners & collaboration



Our efforts are strengthened through collaboration with other local government organisations and strategic partnerships. During the year we took a leadership role within the Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (NAGA), Climate Emergency Australia (CEA), Cities Power Partnership (CPP), ICLEI Oceania, Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy, Better Futures Australia, Climateworks Centre, and the Council Alliance for a Sustainable Built Environment (CASBE).

### Collaborators




### Zero Carbon Merri-bek Mural

Our cover photo is of a new mural in Coburg by artists Hayden Dewar. The mural celebrates our local environment and the opportunity for positive change of a zero carbon Merri-bek. The mural is part of Merri-bek's RenuWall program to beautify our public spaces, engage our arts community in meaningful public artwork and address graffiti hotspots in Merri-bek.

# Key achievements



## Community Solar & Storage




**39MW**  
of solar across 8,700 residential households




**24MW**  
of solar across 500 non-residential properties



2025 target:  
**44MW**  
Community solar target




**1.6MWh**  
of battery storage




**121 Residents on a low-income supported**  
Residents on low incomes received financial support from Council for a solar or energy upgrade

## Council Solar



**1.29MW**  
Council solar



**42**  
Council buildings with solar


## Waste & Litter



**13,173**  
tonnes of food scraps and garden waste collected



**Over 45**  
cubic metres of household compost, made from food and garden waste




**7**  
community gardens received free compost




**195**  
residents received subsidised composting equipment



**119 tonnes**  
of hard waste was recycled



**284kg**  
of florescent tubes & globes recycled



**816kg**  
of household batteries recycled




**57kg**  
of mobile phones recycled




**183kg**  
of digital cameras and other small e-waste recycled


## Electric vehicles & chargers



**29**  
Electric vehicle chargers




**17**  
Public electric vehicle chargers



Over **20,000**  
electric vehicle charging sessions


## Sustainable Buildings



**6.9**  
stars average energy rating for new house plans



**7.4**  
stars average energy rating for new apartment plans



**18**  
new apartment developments committing to above 7 stars

## Reducing Council's Carbon Emissions



Zero Carbon Merri-bek is a community and council movement to achieve a safe climate for all of Merri-bek. More households, businesses and councils are facing the urgent challenge of responding to the climate emergency, together.

### Reducing Council's emissions

Council has reduced its annual greenhouse gas emissions from Council operations by 69% from our 2011 baseline. We anticipate further carbon savings from the refurbishment and electrification of Fawkner Leisure Centre which started in 2023.

Merri-bek is certified as carbon neutral under the Federal Government's Climate Active program. As one of the first councils in Australia to become certified carbon neutral, we are proud of our investment in efficient and clean energy.

To achieve and maintain this certification, each year Council undertakes a continuous improvement approach to carbon management through the following four steps: Measure, Reduce, Generate and Offset.

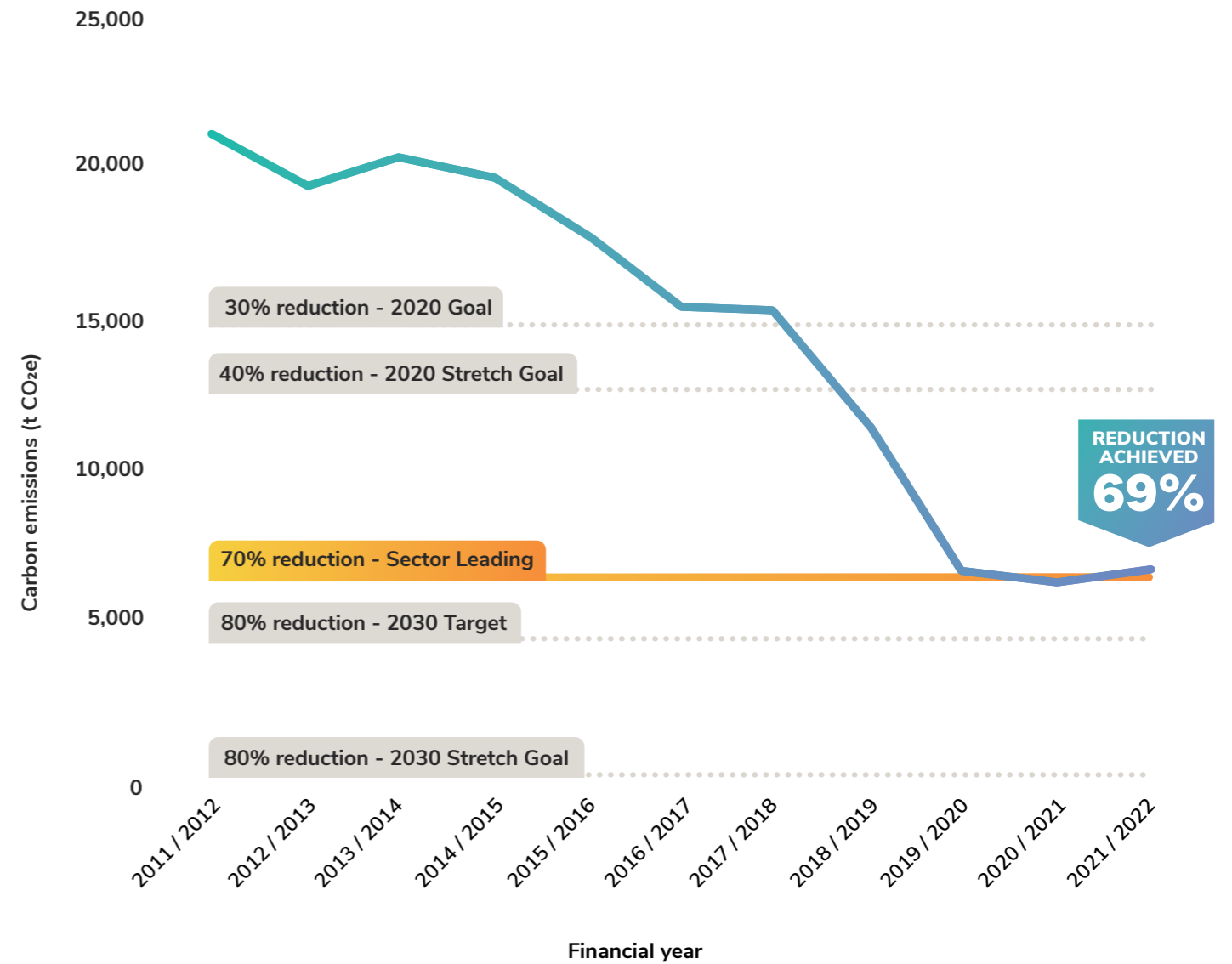


Flemming Park Solar. Photo: Building Engineering

### More Solar on Council Buildings

We have now installed 1.29MW of solar power across 42 Council buildings. New solar systems completed or begun in 2022/23 include a 42 kilowatt (kW) system at Fleming Park, a 30kW system at CB Smith, and the addition of 27kW to the existing 66kW system at Walter Street Depot. Large solar installations are planned for Fawkner Leisure Centre and the Saxon Street Cultural and Community Hub.

### Merri-bek City Council's carbon emissions



# Climate emergency



Zero Carbon Merri-bek is a community and Council movement to achieve a safe climate for all of Merri-bek. More households, businesses and councils are facing the urgent challenge of responding to the climate emergency, together.

## Community and Council mobilisation

We reached over 21,000 community members through our Zero Carbon Merri-bek website, social media, e-newsletter and events.

➔ [zerocarbonmerri-bek.org.au](https://zerocarbonmerri-bek.org.au) continued to encourage community action and promote the activities of community groups, Council and partners, with usage increasing by 43% in 2022/23.



## The Adaptation Game

In 2022 Merri-bek Council partnered with researchers and a group of creatives to develop The Adaptation Game (TAG). The game is designed to help residents prepare for extreme weather events now and in the future. It is an innovative way for the community to talk about and respond to the impact of climate change in their neighbourhoods. The Adaptation Game is a partnership with Deakin University, Goodmorningbeautiful, Amble Studio, Collabforge, and Wax Wings Games.

In December 2022, 30 residents gathered at the Glenroy Community Hub for the first 'playing' of The Adaptation Game. Based on that session, Deakin researchers produced a short film about how playing the game affected those involved, illustrating how the participants found that working together helped them to prepare for predicted climate-related risks.

In June 2023 another 30 residents gathered for another playing of the game led by community facilitators. After playing the game, Neighbours United for Climate Action (NUCA) continued the conversation, connecting people with existing climate-related groups and working to grow new ideas. We are working with TAG partners on how to roll out community game kits so that people can play the game in their own homes, apartment buildings or community groups.

## Community Skills for Climate Action

One year on since the completion of the Community Skills for Climate Action program, participants have held 28 events, engaged with 1853 people and volunteered 1444 hours on local climate action. The program was held across the cities of Darebin, Yarra and Merri-bek from May to September 2021, and gave 75 residents new skills, knowledge and the opportunity to work together on climate action projects.

An evaluation to understand the impacts of the program found a 31 to 1 leverage on Council investment, being an upfront funding of \$32,033 resulting in \$988,672 of value, largely community investment.

Other highlights:



**79%**  
of participants made useful new relationships and collaborative partnerships



**68%**  
are now engaged in additional climate-related groups or activities



**82%**  
more confident to reach out to groups that are underrepresented

*"Taking chances on new connections has paid off. I've directly worked with and amplified the voices of people who have incredible knowledge and offerings to the climate action movement." – Program Participant*





## Supporting community leadership

Farema Yadzi received the 2023 Merri-bek Women Environment Leadership Australia Community Scholarship. Farema is co-director at Climates, a non-profit, volunteer-run organisation working to support local visions of climate change resilience in communities across the Pacific Islands.

*“This scholarship presents an opportunity for me to develop my leadership skills and contribute more effectively to community-centric climate change responses which consider marginalised groups, including women and people of colour.”*

– Farema Yadzi

## Supporting sustainability in schools and early learning centres

In 2022/23 Council partnered with CERES to deliver professional development (PD) for educators in schools and early learning centres. In March 2023 we delivered a half-day workshop for teachers on the topic of first nations perspectives, held at CERES and attended by 7 teachers. In June 2023, based on a successful session the previous year, we delivered our second PD day for early years educators at CERES, on the themes of nature play and first nations perspectives. This event was again a great success with 30 educators attending.

Merri-bek subsidised 9 early childhood services to undertake Resource Smart modules over the 2023 calendar year, facilitated by CERES. Merri-bek also contracted environmental consultancy Envirocom to deliver incursions on waste and litter reduction to 20 schools and early learning centres.



▶ Watch Lisa and Marks' story

## Electrify Merri-bek

We're supporting our community to be a part of Australia's transition to clean energy by going all-electric. Energy bills are rising for everyone and switching to efficient electric appliances can help reduce costs and protect against future price rises.

In the lead up to winter, we conducted the Electrify Merri-bek campaign which included events, videos showcasing Merri-bek residents, and outdoor, print and online advertising. The campaign led to a 124% increase in visits to our [Go All Electric webpage](#)

We developed a simple Go Electric Action Plan to help residents prepare to go electric, so that when appliances such as hot water need replacing, they are ready to make the switch. The plan also includes tips and available subsidies and support.

In collaboration with Darebin, Yarra and Banyule Councils, we held events demonstrating induction cooking and a webinar with a panel of experts on all-electric homes.



## Bring Your Bills event

Fifty residents received support to help with their energy bills at the Bring Your Bills event at the Glenroy Hub in February 2023.

Led by the 2022 Mike Hill Fellow, Haritima Bahuguna, the event was a collaboration between Merri-bek and Hume Councils to assist vulnerable community members struggling to pay their energy bills. The event connected residents with Council services such as our solar and energy efficiency subsidies, and 12 service providers from the solar, energy, and service sectors. A series of translated videos were developed to promote the event.

Watch the videos here:

▶ English

▶ Turkish Türkçe

▶ Italian Italiano

▶ Greek Ελληνικά

▶ Nepali पंजाबी

▶ Urdu اردو



## Leading councils on electrification

Merri-bek is leading Councils across Australia in supporting residents to be a part of Australia's transition to clean energy by going all-electric.

Created and led by Merri-bek City Council, the Electrify Everything Community of Practice (Community) is a collaboration between local councils to promote the electrification of homes in Australia. The Community provides tools, support, and knowledge exchange across regions and the country. Since it commenced in February 2022, 76 regional and urban councils have joined the Community.

In 2023 Merri-bek led a national communications campaign to amplify the message of electrification, including a toolkit for Councils which includes all-electric home infographics, a communications guide and a set of '5 steps to an all-electric home' that can be tailored for each Council. The campaign has so far reached over 677,000 Australians.



### Advocating for Zero Carbon Merri-bek

To achieve a Zero Carbon Merri-bek, we continued advocating to the state and federal governments to transition to zero carbon at speed. We also advocated to ensure that the transition to zero emissions is cheaper and fairer for everyone.

In August 2023, federal and state Building Ministers agreed to national reforms to make new homes more comfortable, liveable, accessible and energy efficient. The ministers agreed to increase the minimum energy standard for new homes from 6 to 7 stars and introduce an energy budget to encourage the use of energy-efficient appliances. These are the most substantial energy upgrades to the National Construction Code in 12 years.

Merri-bek led advocacy for these reforms in partnership with 36 other councils across Australia, through Climate Emergency Australia. The reforms will mean lower energy bills, healthy, resilient and safe homes for Australians, and an easy and low-cost way to meet Australia's commitment to achieve net zero emissions.

#### Advocacy submissions were also made to:

- » Australian Energy Regulator Ring Fencing Waiver for Community Battery Funding
- » Australian Government on the National Energy Performance Strategy
- » Victorian Government on the Amendment to the City of Melbourne Planning Scheme
- » Victorian Parliament Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria
- » Infrastructure Victoria on the Victorian 30-year Infrastructure Strategy

#### Merri-bek was also a spokesperson for and signed up to joint advocacy such as:

- » Joined 121 Mayors and Councillors across Australia calling on the Australian Government to implement fuel efficiency standards to secure affordable lower and zero emissions vehicles for Australian communities.
- » Joined a broad coalition of community, business, environment, and research sector organisations calling on Energy Ministers to also incorporate social equity and demand-side objectives into the National Energy Objective (NEO). The NEO sets out guiding principles on how Australia's national electricity market operates, and currently focuses on price, reliability, and safety.
- » Joined Mayors across Australia calling on the Australian Government to partner with local government to help drive faster progress on their climate targets, and promote resilience building at the local community level across the nation.



### Towards zero carbon planning scheme

Building on the previous year's work, Merri-bek has continued to develop and promote the Elevating ESD Targets Planning Amendment alongside the Council Alliance for a Sustainable Built Environment.

In a show of unity across the local government sector, 24 councils in July 2022 lodged a planning scheme amendment with the Victorian Government, seeking to introduce planning policy that elevates sustainability requirements for new buildings and encourages a move towards net zero carbon development. The 24 councils represent approximately half the Victorian population.

The amendment seeks to introduce planning policy that elevates sustainability requirements for new buildings and encourages a move towards net zero carbon development.

We are awaiting feedback from the Planning Minister on the amendment. In the meantime as part of the multi-council working group we have overseen a cost-benefit analysis of the proposed Planning Amendment and regular meetings with the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.



### Electrifying Council Buildings

Fawkner Leisure centre will be the first aquatic centre in Victoria to be electrified through refurbishment rather than demolition and rebuild.

We worked to further reduce our Council corporate emissions by conducting an audit of gas appliances (boilers, gas heaters, stoves) across Council sites, allowing us to plan for and budget electrification out to 2030. While Coburg Leisure Centre is due for demolition and rebuild in 2034, we continue to examine options for the electrification of Brunswick Baths and Oak Park Sports and Aquatic Centre. Work has begun at Fawkner Leisure Centre, which is being extensively refurbished. As part of the works gas boilers will be replaced with heat pumps, making the site all-electric.

To support expanding Council's electric vehicle fleet we are planning for a new electrical transformer (2MW) at the Walter St Depot.

## Creating a climate resilient Merri-bek



We are planning and responding to the impacts of climate change to create a climate resilient council and community, with no one left behind.



### Climate Risk Strategy and Action Plan

Following the endorsement of the Climate Risk Strategy in November 2022, the accompanying Action Plan was approved by Council in June 2023. This signals the start of implementation of our work to reduce the impacts of climate change.

Council has taken a whole-of-organisation approach to climate risk and seeks to embed climate risk management and resilience into our processes, systems, and service delivery.

The [Climate Risk Strategy and Action Plan](#) is a foundational piece of work that will help us understand:

- » What climate change means for Merri-bek across the municipality
- » The impacts of climate risk on Council infrastructure, open spaces, natural environments, and community services
- » How climate risk impacts the people of Merri-bek, particularly vulnerable groups, and businesses
- » Our organisational ability to manage climate risk physically, financially and legally
- » How we build climate resilience to best deliver infrastructure, open spaces, natural environments, and community services in cost-effective ways.

The knowledge we gain will help us prepare and design initiatives to support the resilience of our services and infrastructure, and the most at-risk groups in our community.

We wish to continue to learn more about how climate risks affect residents and their households. You can contribute by sharing about how climate risk affects your household at

[Join the conversation](#)



### Council community services and their resilience to heatwaves

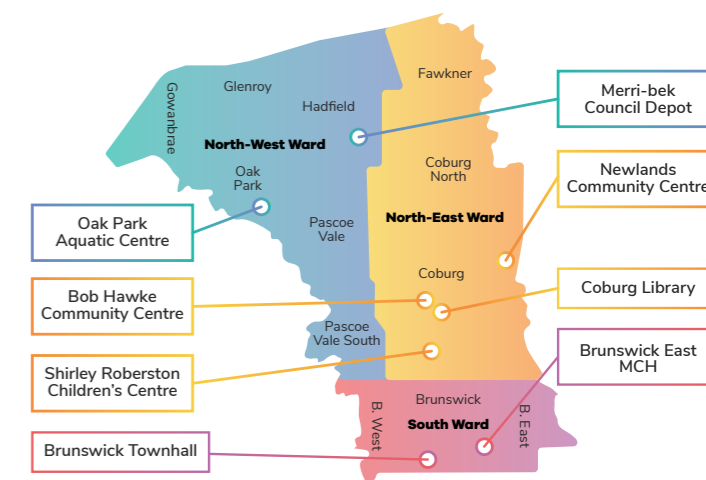
As part of the delivery of the Climate Risk Strategy, Council conducted a project to look at opportunities for improving resilience in our community services.

Services examined in this project included immunisation, maternal and child health, school holidays programs, youth programs, family day care, childcare and kindergartens, community transport, assessment services, meals delivery, home maintenance, personal care, and other services.

The clients of these services are often the most at-risk of health impacts from heatwaves, such as pregnant women, infants and young children, people with disability, and older people.

This resulted in:

- » Recommendations for service planning in the lead up to the hot summer ahead as we face El Nino conditions
- » The need to provide backup power supply for refrigerators that store vaccines for our immunisation services and food for our meal delivery services
- » Options to support staff to ensure we can continue to deliver essential services during extreme weather events
- » Support for our network of service providers and neighbourhood houses to help them prepare for heatwaves.



### Building vulnerability assessments

We are aiming to better understand how our buildings will respond to climate change impacts now and into the future, so that we can continue to provide community services out of these facilities. We have taken the first step and assessed a sample of eight buildings with varying construction types, functions, users, age, and locations.

Using climate projections produced by CSIRO, the assessment looked at risks that may impact Merri-bek such as an increase in temperature, low rainfall and drought, wind, storms and intense rainfall, bushfire-induced air pollution and solar radiation. We used a high-emissions scenario to look at likely impacts for 2030 and 2050 timelines.

The study found that many sustainability and energy efficiency solutions also provide resilience outcomes.

Further recommendations include investment in a range of targeted major infrastructure upgrades to improve building resilience. As well as improvements to our planning such as enhancements to Council's emergency response plans and integration of resilience in asset management planning.

The assessment results provide us with an evidence-based set of recommendations to inform the planning, maintenance and upgrades of our building portfolio over the next decade and beyond.



## Energy



We are supporting our homes, businesses and community groups to transition to energy-efficient buildings and 100% renewable energy. The major sources of our community's carbon emissions are electricity (58%) and gas (23%).

### More renewable power in Merri-bek

Council's commitment and support for Merri-bek to transition to a 100% renewable energy grid continues.

This year, Council has improved the accuracy of reporting on local renewable energy generation. The updated reporting not only confirms that Merri-bek has exceeded its 2025 community solar target, but also gives us a more detailed breakdown into the solar and battery storage installations in Merri-bek. During the year, applicants committed to an additional 2.3MW of solar in new developments as part of Merri-bek's Local ESD Planning Policy.

Our community in total has installed over 63 megawatts (MW) of solar power across 8,700 households and 500 businesses.

### Energy transition

We continue to support Merri-bek residents and businesses to reduce their energy bills and make their homes and businesses warmer in winter and cooler in summer. We have partnered with reputable suppliers to make it easier for residents and businesses to go solar and insulate their homes.

**77**  
**Go Solar**

Residents installed solar with Solar Savers



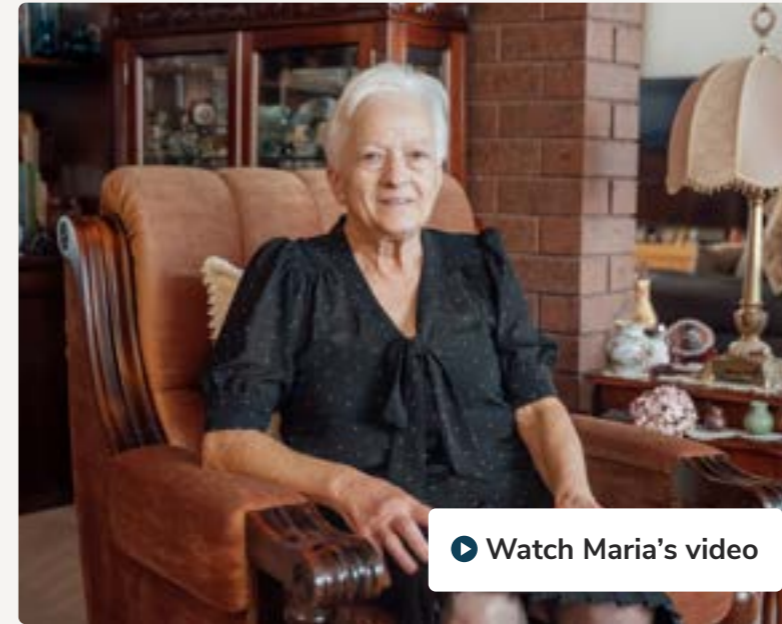
**77**  
**Energy upgrades**

Residents improved the comfort and efficiency of their homes with services from ecocraft and Ecomad



### Federal funding for community battery

Merri-bek City Council has received a \$500,000 Federal Government Community Batteries for Household Solar Program Grant towards a project to install a community battery in Brunswick in the coming two years. Council aims to implement a model where it can receive a portion of the revenue from power stored in this battery, which will be directed towards subsidies for low-income homeowners to install solar panels and upgrade insulation and draughtproofing. Council will also contribute approximately \$600,000 to deliver the battery, which is expected to be installed and producing community benefit by March 2025.



### Home Energy Upgrades Program

Maria had ceiling insulation installed in her Pascoe Vale home in January 2023 with support from Council. Maria read about Merri-bek Council's [support for installing insulation](#) in the Council's newsletter that comes in the post each quarter.

"I knew about the benefits of insulation and what a big difference it makes to your home and your bills," she says. "And I was keen to do it through Council where you're supported through the process."

Having Council pre-select the installers was important to Maria after a previous experience. "Quality tradespeople are very important. I wanted to know that the installers would do a great job. And they did! They were just like family doing the job for you. It took three to four hours for two people and they listened to me to find out exactly what I wanted."

Council contributes up to \$2000 to install insulation or draught sealing for homeowners on a low-income. By making Merri-bek homes more energy efficient, households can save on power bills, be more comfortable, and contribute to a bright future for our community.

The program is a 'one-stop-shop' that supports households through the whole process, including carefully assessing their home for suitability, and providing access to state government rebates and a financial subsidy from Council to cover any out-of-pocket expenses. To date, the program has helped 202 residents save \$145,000 annually.



### Sustainability in apartments

In early 2023, we launched Australia's first [Apartment Guide to Electrification](#). The guide provides a step-by-step process to transition to all-electric for both common areas and homes, whether apartments or townhouses. We also released a new series of guides on sustainable measures that apartment owners and owners corporations can take to improve homes.

There are simple guides for:

- [Townhouses](#)
- [Low-rise apartments](#)
- [Medium-rise apartments](#)
- [High-rise apartments](#)

The guides were developed by Merri-bek Council, Yarra Council and sustainable design experts at Hip v Hype. It is part of the Unlocking Sustainable Strata project that brings together collaborators to learn, trial and design effective solutions that make it easier for people who live in apartments and townhouses to retrofit sustainability technologies. We are working for systemic change and on-ground action.

## Waste and litter



We are transitioning to a zero-waste circular economy, ensuring material efficiency through repair, reuse and recycling.



**13,173**  
tonnes of food scraps and garden waste collected



**Over 45**  
cubic metres of compost, made from food and garden waste



**7**  
community gardens received free compost



**195**  
residents received subsidised composting equipment



### Reducing food waste


Council continues to support community to reduce food waste sent to landfill through the food and garden organics (FOGO) service and composting programs. In 2022/23, 13,173 tonnes of food scraps and garden waste were collected to be turned into compost for Victorian farms and gardens. 45 cubic metres of compost, made from municipal food and garden waste, was delivered to 7 community gardens to nourish soil and grow food locally.

Council supported households to reduce their food waste through the Eat it Don't Bin it Challenge. 50 residents engaged with the program and 78 registered for the 3 on-line workshops.

More community members are composting at home, thanks to our ongoing partnership with Compost Community. In 2022/23, 195 households received subsidies to purchase composting equipment.




**119 tonnes**  
of hard waste was recycled



**816kg**  
of household batteries recycled




**284kg**  
of florescent tubes & globes recycled



**57kg**  
of mobile phones recycled



**183kg**  
of digital cameras and other small e-waste recycled



**11**  
Drinking fountains installed at sports grounds



### Avoiding waste and increasing resource recovery





### Our new 4-bin waste service

With our new 4-bin service starting on 1 July 2023, this year we provided over 135,000 mixed recycling, glass recycling, and food and garden organics bins to Merri-bek households and businesses.

Our new 4-bin service will see food and garden organics and general rubbish bins emptied weekly. Mixed recycling bins will be emptied every 2 weeks. New purple-lidded glass recycling bins for glass bottles and jars will be emptied every 4 weeks.

We implemented an extensive communications and education program to prepare the community for the upcoming changes. In June 2022, all households were sent a user guide, fridge magnet, and waste and recycling collection calendar to help them get started with their new bins.

We delivered over 21,000 kitchen caddies to new food and garden organics service users to support them in collecting their food scraps. These food scraps are then turned into compost for use by Victorian farmers to help grow the food we eat.

We supported over 100 volunteer Waste Champions to help their communities reduce waste and prepare for the new 4-bin waste service. This included the launch of our Waste Champion Information Pack at a forum in February 2022, attended by representatives from our mixed recycling and food and garden organics processors.

Dedicated Council Community Connectors further helped to engage our multicultural communities by sharing information about our 4-bin waste service in community languages and in culturally appropriate ways.

We received Victorian Government funding to put towards the cost of starting the new 4-bin service. This has helped to offset the increased service costs for our ratepayers.



### Booked hard waste trial

The booked hard waste trial finished on 30 June 2023. During the 12-month trial, households could book up to 2 hard waste collections for bulky household items (up to 1 cubic metre) that cannot be recycled or disposed of via kerbside bins.

Initial evaluation indicated a significant reduction in waste to landfill, down from 5046 tonnes in 2021/22 to 1218 tonnes in 2022/23 over the 12-month trial period, representing a **76% reduction in waste to landfill**.

### Recycling

Over the 2023/24 financial year a total of 119 tonnes of material was collected for recycling through the trial booked hard waste collection service, achieving a 9% diversion rate. Recovered items included scrap metal, mattresses, e-waste and white goods.

Through the recycling stations at Council's three customer service centres, we collected 816kg of household batteries, 284kg of florescent tubes and globes, 57kg of mobile phones and 183kg of digital cameras and other small e-waste items for recycling. Promoting repair and reuse, Council partnered with Brunswick Tool Library to enable the Tool Library to run a Repair Café at the 2023 Sydney Road Street Party, fixing items brought in by the community.

Council's 5 main festivals all complied with Council's Plastic Wise Policy, banning 9 single-use plastic food-ware items. Single-use coffee cups were exempt from the ban, as minimal single-use plastic-free alternatives exist. To assist sports clubs reduce their reliance on bottled water and transition to the Policy, Council installed drinking fountains at 11 sports grounds across the municipality, the completion of a 3-year project that installed 28 drinking fountains in total.

As part of a trial, Council purchased reusable crockery and cutlery for Brunswick and Coburg Town Halls in November 2022 and for Merlynston



Progress Hall in February 2023. In 2022 Council also acquired 10 reusable takeaway party packs for staff at Oxygen, Glenroy Community Hub and Council offices, to be used during community and corporate functions.

To promote waste reduction and reuse, Council hosted free monthly waste education workshops for the community. The workshops covered topics such as reusable cloth nappies, zero-waste and plastic-free living, how to 'recycle right' in Merri-bek, visible mending, and fighting food waste.

Council contributes to the Community Litter Clean-up Program facilitated by Merri Creek Management Committee. Five community litter clean-up events were held in 2022/23, with a total of 61 people attending.

# Transport



Transport is responsible for 16% of community's carbon emissions and 33% of Council's emissions. To work towards zero-emissions transport we are rolling out active travel behaviour-change programs and continuing our transition to zero emissions vehicles.



## Ride & Stride program









In 2022, Merri-bek Primary, Brunswick North West Primary and St Oliver Plunkett Primary completed the Ride & Stride program to increase walking, riding and scooting to school. Nine Open Streets were held, were for a short period during drop off and pick up times we open the street outside the school gates to walking, riding, scooting and play without car traffic. Kids used bluetooth tokens, to 'tag on' over 15,000 times at kiosks each morning selecting how they travelled to school that day, earning points for travelling actively, and sending an email to their parents that they have arrived at school. While 47 families trialled a free e-cargo bike loans so they can switch the car for a faster, healthier school run alternative. Read the report on the 2022 program [here](#).

In 2023, we launched the third round of Ride & Stride with 6 new schools – Fawkner Primary, Glenroy West Primary, Coburg Primary, St Margaret Mary's Primary, Oak Park Primary and Brunswick South West Primary. We held our first Open Street for the year at Brunswick South West Primary during May, saw Glenroy West Primary students celebrate National Walk to School Day with the Mayor, and had over 5 families sign up to trial our free e-cargo bike loans.



Merri-bek's Ride & Stride program received the Institute of Transport Engineer's-ANZ Sustainable Transport Award for 2022.

## Ride & Stride 2022 program highlights

 <b>9</b> Open Streets days across the year	 <b>63%</b> of students walked, rode or scooted to school	 <b>97%</b> of families felt the street was safer than normal
 <b>47</b> free e-cargo bike 4-week trials	 <b>67%</b> of participants plan to keep riding to school	 <b>80%</b> of participants now confident to ride with children
 <b>15,834</b> TagOns in 2022	 <b>55</b> average TagOns per day at each school	



▶ Watch a video of our Open Streets trials for 2022





## Continuing our work with existing Ride & Stride schools

As the Ride & Stride program grows and works with new schools each year, we continue to support our existing Ride & Stride schools. Over the last year, we have worked to scale up programs such as Open Streets and offered another round of e-cargo bike subsidies to embed active travel more deeply in the schools.

Coburg North Primary, from our 2021 round, and Merri-bek Primary, from our 2022 round, have both launched our school-led Open Streets program. Following the success of their Open Streets trials with Bicycle Network, these schools have now trained parent volunteers to run monthly Open Streets. Giving schools the agency and tools to run these events themselves embeds active and sustainable travel into the school community and empowers local parents and residents to create the changes they want to see in their local streets.



## Women's & non-binary bike skills sessions

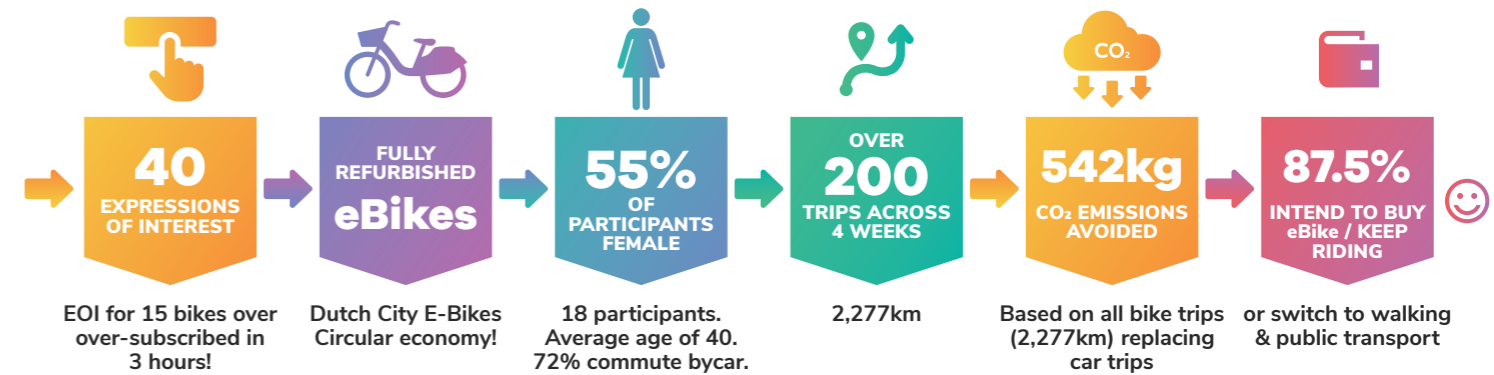
We know that women and non-binary people are underrepresented and often face unique barriers when it comes to bike riding in our community.

➔ **Recent research in Melbourne** has highlighted many of the barriers women face, with knowledge and confidence in bike maintenance skills one of the key concerns. These sessions aimed to upskill Merri-bek women and non-binary, trans and gender-diverse people in basic bike maintenance to help address some of these concerns and create an inclusive environment to empower more women to ride.

Over May and June 2023, we held 6 sessions across Glenroy, Brunswick and Coburg Libraries, training 67 people.

- » 72% said that session being only for women and non-binary people influenced their decision to sign up for the course
- » 98% enjoyed the skills course
- » 96% felt that they learnt skills and improved their confidence in bike maintenance skills
- » 77% said that they are now more likely to ride their bike for transport or ride more often as a result of the course

## eBike trials highlights



## E-bike trials for Merri-bek staff

As one of the largest employers in the municipality, we know that working to decrease the number of trips driven to council offices is an important step in addressing our council's transport emissions. We also know that many staff at Council are interested in trying out alternative, more sustainable ways of travelling to work each day.

Partnering with RideKola, we offered 18 staff the opportunity to 'leave the car at home' and test out a refurbished dutch e-bike for a month and leave the car at home.

*"The bikes were amazing and made riding so easy. You can wear normal work clothes, the bikes were fully equipped with great locks, lights and a basket. The powerful battery made the hills a breeze, so there was no need to shower when you arrived at work"* – Lisa, Business Team



## Making walking and riding bikes safer

To make walking and riding safer in Merri-bek, we are installing permanent shared zones on Victoria Street and Albert Street over the coming 12 months, supported by the Victorian Government's 2022 Living Local Fund Suburban Grants. The grant program provides dollar-for-dollar funding to support projects that improve accessibility, safety, and beautification in neighbourhood activity centres and shopping strips. Council also formally adopted the closures of John Street and Carlisle Street, making these safer streets for active transport options.

We talked to the Fawkner community to understand what needs to change to make it easier to walk, ride bikes and catch public transport in Fawkner. The Fawkner Study is currently under review and further work will be done to identify and plan projects to achieve these goals.

We also commenced work and community consultation on the new Merri-bek transport strategy, a framework to guide all our transport projects to be more accessible, sustainable, and future-proof. The new strategy is expected to be adopted in March 2024.

▶ Watch video 'Merri-bek and Bicycle Network's Open Streets Trials 2022'



### Supporting uptake of electric vehicles

In 2022/23 we expanded Council's network of electric vehicle (EV) chargers with two public chargers at Fleming Park and six chargers for the Council fleet. Council's charging portfolio now consists of 29 chargers, 17 of which are accessible to the public. The public network saw over 20,000 charging sessions in 2022/23, 30 per cent higher than in 2021/22. Two fast chargers at the Brunswick EV hub which were experiencing repeated outages have been replaced and the new dual charger is operating well, supplying over 30 sessions per day. All electricity from Council's chargers is backed by renewable certificates from the Crowlands Wind Farm.

As part of the Northern Councils Alliance, we developed the **Community Electric Vehicle Transition Plan**. Informed by this plan, in June Council approved a report guiding how we will manage our public charging in the future. In 2023/24, Council will examine the possibility of leasing parking bays to EV charging operators. Council also decided to implement a price of 25c/kWh at our three fast chargers. This revenue will be re-invested in maintaining and expanding Council's charging infrastructure, and guards against Council out-competing the private sector.



**29**

Electric vehicle chargers



**17**

Public electric vehicle chargers



Over **20,000** electric vehicle charging sessions



**30** Council electric vans and cars

▶ Watch video 'Greening the streets: One council's journey to a zero-emission fleet'



## Water



**Our Integrated Water Management Strategy 2040 and 5-year action plan includes actions to invest in urban planning and design to harvest and reuse stormwater, stopping it from reaching our waterways.**

Throughout the year, we undertook projects to make use of stormwater and reduce the pollutants it releases into our rivers, creeks and Port Phillip Bay. These initiatives have enhanced the environmental and recreational value of our open spaces.

Projects included:

- » Construction, landscaping, and revegetation works at Moomba Park Wetland and the Growling Grass Frog Pond in Fawkner. The wetland has led to improved stormwater quality and restored habitat and biodiversity, while also enhancing the recreational appeal of the area.
- » Completion of raingardens at Garrong Park, Wheatsheaf Community Hub Carpark, Fleming Park, Melville Road, and Richards Reserve.
- » Started design for stormwater harvesting at AG Gilon and Reaburn Reserve. This system will redirect stormwater from local streets and treat it through a raingarden, allowing us to reuse the treated water for irrigating neighbourhood parks. This is expected to save a substantial 24.4 megalitres of drinking water annually. The design also includes landscaping and improvements in access to the reserve.
- » Design to provide passive irrigation to trees at Stewart Street, using permeable asphalt.
- » Design of tree pits and raingardens in Eddy and Brown Streets, with construction soon to start.
- » Started the design of the Gilpin Wetland. Once constructed, the wetland will serve as a natural treatment system, effectively removing pollutants from stormwater before it enters our creeks, rivers, and oceans.

The Council's commitment to integrated water management is evident through its inclusion in various capital projects such as street upgrades and new buildings.

### Waterwatch

The Waterwatch program receives strong support from Council and is delivered by the Merri Creek Management Committee. This impactful community education and engagement initiative has offered a total of 35 activities to schools, kindergartens, and community groups, ranging from fascinating waterbug displays and water quality testing to litter collection during community events. Through these engaging activities, the program has been instrumental in establishing strong connections between local communities and fostering awareness about the importance of sustainable water management practices.



### Catchment-scale Integrated Water Management Plan for Merri-bek

In 2022, Merri-bek completed an innovative catchment-scale Integrated Water Management (IWM) study. Working with stakeholders, we developed an assessment model for prioritising IWM actions. We trialled the model with the Melville drainage sub-catchment. Melville sub-catchment has large green areas with high irrigation rates, high urban heat, and a large number of properties vulnerable to flooding.

Not only did we develop a wholistic approach to reduce flood risk, but we also incorporated actions to capture, treat and distribute storm-water. This will improve water security in a changing climate. Council is planning to replicate this project in Merri-bek's 9 other sub-catchments.

### Integrated Water Management Forum

Merri-bek sits on two Victorian Government Integrated Water Management Forum: Yarra Catchment and Maribyrnong Catchment. The forums oversee, support and facilitate water's contribution to resilient and liveable cities and towns.

Merri-bek was a leading contributor to the development of the Forums new strategies. The strategies incorporate our sub-catchment model with clear targets and measures. Ten-year action plans (2023-2033) are being developed which will prioritise projects for future funding.



### New wildlife refuge in Merri-bek

We're lucky to have significant remnant vegetation and large tracts of revegetated areas in Merri-bek, particularly along the creek corridors. Merri-bek is also home to one of Australia's last communities of the ground-dwelling Growling Grass Frog. Once abundant across south-eastern Australia, Growling Grass Frogs are now listed as Vulnerable nationally, but they still live in pockets of the Merri Creek.

The new Moomba Park Wetland in Fawkner is a new home for the Growling Grass Frog. The Moomba Park Wetland also treats stormwater from local streets so that our natural waterways are healthier and cleaner. Moomba Park Wetland was jointly funded by Merri-bek City Council and Melbourne Water.



## Nature



To better protect and enhance nature in Merri-bek, we developed a Nature Plan to support a more diverse, connected and resilient natural environment where native birds and animals thrive and where residents explore, value and connect with nature.



Council has continued maintenance, regeneration and renewal of 53 hectares of conservation area through intensive weed management, ecological burning, fencing, pest animal control and planting to enhance biodiversity. Over 20,000 locally indigenous plants were planted this year by Council and community in our reserves, community gardens and nature strips.

Over 6000m<sup>2</sup> of new revegetation sites have been added along the Merri Creek at Spry Street, Moomba Park, Gavin Park on the Westbreen Creek and the Moonee Ponds Creek at Hopetoun Avenue.

We helped convert 28 nature strips with plantings for biodiversity. Council prepared sites and provided plants and mulch to residents and community groups in Merri-bek. Fifteen of these are study sites for an ongoing urban ecology research project looking at the abundance of insects and birds in biodiverse gardens compared with turf grass nature strips. The results of this study will further our understanding of how small patches can support biodiversity in cities.



### Community connecting with our local nature

This year council hosted 25 nature events with over 1000 participants including planting days, nature play events, litter clean-ups, citizen science events and nature talks. National Tree Day is our biggest community planting event of the year, with the event in July 2022 including a bee hotel workshop and the planting of an indigenous wildflower garden at KW Joyce Reserve, Pascoe Vale.

We hosted in-person and online events as part of the City Nature Challenge and the Great Southern Bioblitz. For National Bird Week we hosted a bird talk and surveys along the Merri Creek, and promoted the Aussie Backyard Bird Count. This year 466 participants in Merri-bek recorded over 17,000 observations giving us valuable information about our local birdlife.

Another cohort of Nature Stewards graduated this year. In partnership with the Victorian National Parks Association and our neighbours across the creek, Moonee Valley City Council, this 10-week environmental course educated and inspired our residents to take action and become environmental leaders in their community.

Supported by Council, the CERES Schools for Wildlife program saw 4 schools in Merri-bek convert an area of their playground into habitat gardens for wildlife.



### Reducing the urban heat island effect

The urban heat island effect – excess heat trapped in built-up areas – is an issue we need to address as our ageing population and climate change make us vulnerable to extreme heat. In 2022/23 we completed further work to reduce the build-up of heat with 5469 new trees planted, exceeding the annual tree planting targets we committed to in the Council Plan. In an innovative trial, some of the soils within these sites are being monitored for changes in soil moisture using sensors and monitoring equipment.

We undertook canopy modelling to identify soft- and hard-stand areas within the municipality that can accommodate trees and developed a permeability reference layer to inform future tree planting priorities. Recognising that trees can reduce urban heat build-up, Council has committed an extra \$300,000 to tree planting programs in hard-stand areas in the 2023/24 budget.

We have also updated our thermal mapping so that we can prioritise our urban heat mitigation activities and measure how much of an impact our efforts have had on reducing previously measured urban heat.

Combined with the various projects to integrate water in the landscape, these 'green' and 'blue' projects are gradually helping to cool the local environment to adapt to our changing climate

## Sustainable Buildings

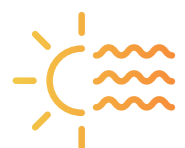


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### Merri-bek Environmentally Sustainable Development (ESD)

Assessment of ESD planning permits and engagement with developers over the past year leads to better buildings including:

- » An average 6.9 stars NatHERS energy rating for class 1 detached dwellings (including townhouses) and 7.4 stars for class 2 apartments throughout Merri-bek (above the average of Merri-bek's minimum standard, 6.5 stars). The minimum in the National Construction Code is currently 6.0 stars
- » Eighteen developments committed to a 7 or 7+ star average with six developments committing to 7.5 stars+ and 1 development committing to 8.1 stars
- » Non-residential development such as offices, shops, supermarkets and warehouses have an energy performance improvement of 10 per cent above the minimum National Construction Code
- » 793kW of rooftop solar PV systems committed to being installed
- » A rapidly increasing trend for development applications to be 'all-electric' to avoid the use of gas, with 42 developments committing to going all-electric
- » Improved natural ventilation and shading of windows in developments to increase energy efficiency
- » 2274kL of rainwater tanks approved in Merri-bek, collecting vast volumes of water to mostly be used for toilet flushing and supporting the health of Merri and Moonee Ponds Creeks
- » On average, new developments achieve 34 per cent drinking water savings compared with conventional buildings
- » 263.4m<sup>2</sup> of raingardens committed to being installed
- » 1424 new bicycle spaces
- » 337 electric vehicle charging infrastructure spaces committed to being installed
- » The average carbon emissions committed to in the Built Environment Sustainability Scorecard tool was 57 per cent less than in a conventional building
- » Requesting light or medium colours for roofs and driveways, and a maximum of 25 per cent of external walls to be a dark colour, to reduce the levels of excess heat in the urban environment.



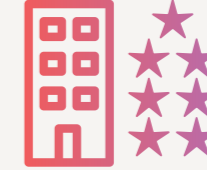
The Climate Change and Planning in Victoria project that Merri-bek is a partner of won the Planning Institute of Victoria's Victorian state award for Climate Change and Resilience.



**6.9**  
stars average  
energy rating for  
new houses



**7.4**  
stars average  
energy rating for  
new apartments



**18**  
new apartment  
developments  
committing to  
above 7 stars



**793kW**  
solar committed  
to being installed



**42**  
developments  
committing to  
going all-electric



**2274kL**  
of rainwater  
tanks approved  
in Merri-bek



**34%**  
reduction in  
water use in new  
developments



**263.4m<sup>2</sup>**  
of raingardens  
committed to  
being installed



**1,424**  
new bicycle  
spaces



**337**  
electric vehicle charging infrastructure  
spaces committed to being installed



**Merri-bek**  
City Council

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