

Sisters on the Planet
8 March 2009

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Today we celebrate International Women's Day, which is about remembering the battles that women have fought to create a community that is just and fair to all its members - a society in which diversity, tolerance, safety, social justice and equality between women and men is a given.

Just a little history if I may...in 1908, 15,000 New York female textile workers went on strike. These women agitated for voting rights, better working conditions and shorter working hours. This strike eventually led to socialist women organising the first International Women's Day. Some 20 years later on March 25, 1928, the Militant Women's Movement initiated the first IWD march in Sydney. The women's demands included gender pay equity, reduced hours in retail work and the abolition of piece work. Rallies and marches have been held throughout Australia every year since.

Today's women belong to a rich and varied tapestry – some are in paid work, some are not, some are volunteers, some of us are mothers, carers, sisters, daughters and friends. Women are the very cornerstone of our community. International Women's Day provides an opportunity for communities to recognise and celebrate local women's achievements and the contribution they continue to make to their area.

Today we also discuss sustainability. Environmental sustainability is protecting and maintaining our natural environment through conservation, rehabilitation and education. Over the last decade, Kogarah Council has led best practice in local government environmental sustainability management.

Like many Australian Councils, Kogarah is relatively small, however we punch well above our weight on sustainability. Over time, we have put in place many climate change programs - many of which have won awards both locally and globally. Some of our sustainability award highlights have included:

- Keep Australia Beautiful Sustainable Cities 2008 Awards – Council's E-Waste Recycling Collection Program
- Stormwater Industry Association's Excellence in Stormwater Education Award for 2007 (Catchment Crusaders Environmental Education Program) (this was a program where Council officers visited local schools and talked to year 4 children about the impact of catchment water quality on the local environment)
- International Water Association's Project Innovation Awards 2007, Grand Honour Winner (Beverley Park Water Reclamation Plant)
- The Institute of Public Works Engineering Australia (IPWEA) Environmental Award 2007 for our Beverley Park Water Reclamation Plant

While we are proud of these awards, more importantly the Beverley Park Water Reclamation Plant will save up to 125 million litres of Sydney's drinking water every year. Water storage tanks have been installed in several parks along with irrigation systems that will water our sports fields with recycled

water. For those of you who may not be aware of this facility, this is located off Ramsgate Road at Beverley Park Golf Course, and Kogarah Council was the first NSW council to sign a sewer mining agreement with Sydney water to establish this facility.

In addition, another 147 million litres of drinking water will be saved by Council's water saving efforts as part of Sydney Water's Every Drop Counts Business Program.

In 2007, Kogarah Council replanted many of the garden beds around Kogarah with native plants, which was estimated to save around 1 million litres of water per year.

Kogarah Council has also installed a solar panelled roof at the Kogarah Council Works Depot. The new panels will reduce the use of coal fired energy by up to 70%, which is the equivalent of taking 21, 220 cars off the road for one year. the solar system provides energy for lighting, heating and air-conditioning with additional electricity stored for reuse.

In June 2008, then Mayor Nick Katris, signed the Mayor's Agreement on Climate Change, which aims to reduce Kogarah Council's greenhouse gas emissions by 45% by 2015. Ambitious yes, but if we are going to think globally, we must act locally.

Kogarah Council has also been a member of the international Cities for Climate Protection (CCP) Program. This is an innovative program that helps local government and their communities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through energy efficiency, transport management, building policies, waste management and land-use strategies. Participation requires council to achieve five milestones:

1. Establish an inventory and forecast for key sources of greenhouse gas emissions in the council and community;
2. Set an emissions reduction goal;
3. Develop and adopt a local greenhouse action plan to achieve those reductions;
4. Implement the Local Action Plan (LAP); and
5. Monitor and report on greenhouse emissions and implementation of actions and measures.

Kogarah Council has completed all 5 milestones and has recently the joined the Cities for Climate Protection Plus Program to continue its commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

These are just a few examples of Kogarah Council's ongoing commitment to environmental sustainability, however we realise that there's so much more to sustainability than the environment. Whilst it's a very important part – it is but a part.

The establishment of Carss Park community garden will combine both interaction with other residents and a sense of community, with a connection to the environment. Sustaining our human communities is equally as important – and in that respect, women play a huge role.

Those who have gone before us have paved the way to make the lives of those who follow just a little easier. It is now up to us to sustain our communities and our environment for future generations.

Please continue to support the women around you – not just your friends, but your neighbours and acquaintances too. And in so doing, help us continue to build a sustainable community.