

GREEN GLOBE AWARDS

ADVERTISING FEATURE

Light the way

CLIMATE CHANGE MAY BE A GLOBAL PROBLEM, BUT THERE'S PLENTY THAT CAN BE DONE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE



The Olympic Cauldron, pictured, at Sydney Olympic Park uses recycled water.

WINNERS of the NSW Government's Green Globe Awards, named at Parliament House last night, show what can be achieved through an innovative approach.

"Yes, we have a long way to go, but (the awards) are a chance to look up and see that we're actually doing quite well," says awards judge and Green Building Council of Australia chief operating officer, Robin Mellon.

Winners are spread across 14 categories, including a new Heritage Sustainability Award. The inaugural winner, the Quarantine Station at Manly's North Head, has turned 65 listed buildings into a luxurious retreat with low environmental impact.

GPT Group property

company was joint winner of the overall Premier's Award. Its environmental management produced utility savings of \$20.4 million last year.

"It's not just about using new technologies, but also about behavioural change, getting staff involved and working with communities," Mr Mellon says.

Sydney Olympic Park took out the 10 Year Sustainability Achievement Award for its efforts, which include water recycling, native plantings and solar ticket dispensers.

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Details: environment.nsw.gov.au/greenglobes



Above, market gardener James Greagh shows off his organic garlic on a tour of his sustainable garden in Nimbin; left, produce at the local Blue Knob Farmers Market.

Hippies got it right

STEREOTYPED as a hippie hub, Nimbin is now leading the way in what has become a very mainstream move towards sustainable communities. The colourful village in the NSW northern rivers region received vindication for decades of environmentalism when the Nimbin Neighbourhood and Information Centre (NNIC) won the Community Sustainability Award, and overall Premier's prize at last night's Green Globe Awards.

"Maybe the hippies weren't so crazy after all," muses NNIC manager Natalie Meyer.

"(Our environmental initiatives) have been seen as more of an alternative mission, but now they're things that are seen as quite sensible."

Food security is one of the centre's key focus areas.

NNIC helped launch the now thriving Blue Knob Farmers Market and runs a food-equipment library with dehydrators, honey extractors, a seed mill and beekeeping gear. These initiatives, along with educational workshops and a jar-recycling scheme for

locals who preserve excess produce, have prompted about 20 per cent more local food production and consumption since 2009.

In addition, a mobile grain mill used by the community addresses what Ms Meyer describes as the region's "greatest food security weakness".

"We can't really grow grain here, and siloing grain is difficult because it's too humid," she says. "But individual households can store sacks of grain - it has a longer shelf-life than flour - and mill it when needed."

Ultimately, though, NNIC is trying to educate the community on eating more locally adapted, seasonal diets.

A focus on small-to-medium-scale local food production and supply contrasts with Nimbin's history as a dairy town.

The 1960s recession and deregulation of the dairy industry saw local farms collapse and Nimbin turned into a virtual ghost town. But its course changed dramatically after it hosted a

counter-cultural arts and music event, the Aquarius Festival in 1973.

"We have been going down this (sustainability) road for 40 years, since a bunch of alternative-thinking people settled here after the Aquarius Festival," Ms Meyer says.

"All these young people came in with fresh ideas, idealism and alternate thinking ways, making Nimbin central to the whole sustainability movement. It has been a really hard road being seen as this complete bunch of nutters."

"It's about time that others caught on."

Other initiatives by the NNIC include a solar farm, with panels spread over six buildings. These feed about 61,000kw hours of energy back into the grid each year and returns are used to pay the wages of community workers.

These workers fuel other environmental initiatives and benefit from job creation in an area where unemployment is more than twice the national average. With most employment and study opportunities based in

Lismore, about 35km away, NNIC also entered a partnership with a local bus company to trial after-hours runs for commuters.

There are more exciting initiatives in store, with planning in progress for a sustainable-living hub, based at a property purchased through community fundraising.

A cottage will be retrofitted and new buildings will be built to demonstrate what can be done with local materials such as hemp masonry, straw bale and bamboo.

"It will also be used as a workshop space so people can learn how to build their own house," Ms Meyer says. The project will focus on affordability and providing alternatives to high-end technologies.

Overall, Nimbin's achievements show what can be accomplished when a community works together.

"You break it down to bite-sized pieces that are manageable and as more communities start running with this stuff, it starts forming a bigger picture," Ms Meyer says.



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