GIPPSLAND NEW ENERGY CONFERENCE REPORT 2023
SALE GIPPSLAND

Abstract

The Gippsland New Energy Conference (GNEC) 2023 and Sustainability Report with recommendations for GNEC 24.

Presented By:

Darren McCubbin

Chief Executive Officer
Gippsland Climate Change Network
enquiries@gccn.org.au
www.gccn.org.au

Table of Contents

4 Executive Summary

7 Conference Team

9 Conference Guiding Principles

10 Our Sponsors

12 Conference by Numbers

13 Survey Characteristics

14 Survey Response and Recommendations

38 Sustainability Report

Overview

The Gippsland New Energy Conference GNEC23 played a pivotal role in catalyzing opportunities in renewable power for the Gippsland region. Through developing networks and building on International experience, GNEC explored the pathways to job creation, and the development of a robust renewable energy supply chain without avoiding the difficult conversations regarding transmission routes and finding low impact solutions.

Thank to Wellington Shire for being wonderful hosts and the expertise of the Latrobe Valley Authority and the local team from the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action plus a team of willing workers from around the state. We also thank the professional team at Nanoo Nanoo for their event management and Tinamba Hotel for the event catering. With their assistance, we are proud to have developed the largest conference of its type in a regional area.

This review continues our practice of self-reflection and improvement using responses from the survey conducted online after the conference and conversations with key stakeholders. These responses form recommendations that will initiate further discussions with the new working group to create an even more spectacular conference in 2024.

We hope to see you there.

Darren McCubbin
CEO
Gippsland Climate Change Network

Executive Summary

Recommendation One

a. Continue GNEC in 2024.

b. Look for a location that provides a “Precinct Style” atmosphere that encourages informal gatherings within professional conference surroundings.

c. Position the conference in early September and away from GWEC24 in Sth Korea. Try to avoid State and Federal Parliamentary sittings to maximise the potential for Ministers to appear.

d. Consider running the conference on a Wednesday and Thursday with the Youth Summit on the Friday and the Community event on the Friday night.

e. In considering the attendees:

- i. Restrict the numbers to a manageable size by a limit on the numbers from each organization
- ii. Continue to provide tickets to the community through sponsorship, reduced rates and preferential availability.
- iii. Retain a Gippsland and Regional Flavour
- iv. Develop our connection to First Nations
- v. Continue Plenary and breakout session model with conference dinner on first night.

f. Lift the expectation that this has become a significant National event with the involvement of Federal and State Ministers and significant high-profile speakers.

Recommendation Two

That a working group be developed early in 2024 to actively curate GNEC content with a Gippsland focus. Panel sessions be encouraged with a variety of diverse speakers to provide a deep dive into the issues raised. Being a sponsor does not guarantee you a speaking spot.

Recommendation Three

The Whova app be retained for GNEC 2024 with administrators looking to:

a. Bring the Whova app online only two weeks prior.
b. Find a way to use anonymous settings for asking questions.
c. Less focus on the “leader board” that often provides benefits for fake meet ups.
d. Create a low impact leader board to encourage sustainable practices.
e. Consider a hard cutoff for changes to personnel.

Recommendation Four

A single overall coordinator of the catering should be appointed to ensure:

a) The Conference provide high quality food and drink options from local providers.
b) We deliver a range of well labelled dietary options.
c) We continue to promote low impact practices and utilise food waste appropriately.

The Conference dinner on the first night should be a “conference staple” however consider opportunities to move the participants around and restrict the dinner entertainment to a sponsor welcome and background music.

Recommendation Five

The Expo sites are a valuable addition to the conference and need to be encouraged by locating them in the one place where possible and/or clearly indicate where each is located.

a. Managing the expectation of the expo providers by providing clear guidelines and requirements.
b. Provide ticketing options so that expo providers can have staff for their sites during the conference sessions.

Recommendation Six

The Conference continues to maintain a close relationship with sponsors as valued partners in its presentation. The sponsorship package values and inclusions should be reviewed in 2024 to ensure that there's still strong partnership and involvement but it's also easier to coordinate and deliver.

Recommendation Seven

That the Conference create a separate sustainability subcommittee that continues to develop sustainable practices. The sustainability processes from the conference be written up into a brief guide that can be shared with other Gippsland organisations and events as a best practice model to learn from and build on.

Recommendation Eight

That the Youth Summit on a separate day is a key component of any Gippsland New Energy Conference. Student representatives should also be given the opportunity to attend the other days, appear on panels and contribute to the broader discussion.

Recommendation Nine

To cater for the numbers of people who want to access the conference to create a serious online GNEC+ streaming service, separately curated and with an online host.

Recommendation Ten

That we continue the Community Expo as part of the program for 2024 but look to trial it on a Friday night say 5.30pm – 8.30pm with food trucks and a high-profile guest speaker.

Recommendation Eleven

The Gippsland New Energy Coordination Group should assess the possible locations for GNEC24 under the criteria described deciding a location before the end of the year.

Conference Team

Conference Manager - Darren McCubbin (GCCN)

Event Management – Eloisa Tripodi and Dan Clancey (Nanoo Nanoo)

Conference Organiser and Communications - Michelle Isles (GCCN) with Esther Lloyd (GCCN)

Conference Design – Fybian Chakaodosa (GCCN)

Youth Summit Coordination – Shannon Egan (TAFE Gippsland) and Ashley Hall (LVA) with Mandy Neave (GLaWAC), Jaide Stevens (GELLEN), Pauline Boulton (South Gippsland Shire), Sarita Torres (LVA), David L Hood (DEECA), Jessica Reeves (Federation University), Juliet Rovery (Centre for Multicultural Youth) Mary Barry (Circularco), Brentan Peters (GCCN), Elise Watson (TAFE Gippsland), Sharon Ray (Wellington Shire), Wendy Farmer (Voice of the Valley & Friends of the Earth)

Front of House Coordinator - Julianne Sargant (DEECA)

Sustainability Coordinator – David Hood (DEECA)

Catering Manager – Simon Johnson (Tinamba Hotel)

Community Day Coordinator – Carina Turner (GCCN) with Nicola Pero (Iberdrola Australia)

Conference Communications – Cindy Morrison (LVA)

Technical Manager – Rowan Churchill (WEDGE)

Conference Organisation Group – Ashley Smirl & Kirsten Power (Wellington Shire), Glen McColl (Latrobe City), Bodye Darvill (LVA), Esther Lloyd (GCCN) and Brentan Peters (GCCN and Federation University)

Other working group members

Cr. Carolyn Crossley – GCCN	Tim Rowe
Sarita Torres – LVA	Stella Bodman – Star of the South
Elise Erwin – RDV	Julie Wilson – AusIndustry
Emma George – DEECA	Andrew Ho – Orsted
Lawrence Molloy – DEECA	Alex Finlayson – Orsted
Simon Robert – DEECA	Marika Kirton - Orsted
Andrew O'Loughlin – Federation University	Kate Lancaster – BlueFloat Energy
	Claire Baker – Marinus Link
Michelle Anderson – Federation University	Josie Hess – NSFW Productions
	Stephanie Sabrinskas – NSFW Productions
Erin Lord – Flotation Energy	
Heath Kantor – Solar Victoria	Scott Douglas – GreenLab Futures
Pablo Salina – Solar Victoria	Tim Peterson – Solar Victoria
Heidi Hamm – Sustainability Victoria	Annelise Answerth – Gippsland Water
Kate Foster – Corio Generation	Jeannine Thwaite - TAFE Victoria OTCD
Ken Frazer – South Gippsland Shire	Marilyn Steel - Shell Australia
Tony Cantwell – Committee for Gippsland	Nicola Pero – Iberdrola Australia
	Lachlan Holmes – CarbonNet
Paul Johnson – Star of the South	Lorrenzo DeVirgilio – Marathon Industries
Brett Singh – Marathon Industries	

Gippsland New Energy Conference runs as a collaborative partner model. The conference team is made up of New Energy and community development professionals from government, not-for-profit and industry, and is also open to other community members.

We would like to thank the Wellington Shire Council for being such gracious hosts and the WEDGE and Port of Sale teams for their dedication and assistance.

The Conference organisers acknowledge the coordination of the Latrobe Valley Authority and the Gippsland New Energy Coordinating Group who guide the development of the Conference and ensure it reflects the views of Gippsland stakeholders.

Conference Guiding Principles

The conference team agreed to honour the following principles determined by discussion of the working group at the beginning of the process:

- The Conference is held on Gunaikurnai Country and acknowledges elders past and present. The Conference will enable the voices of community to be heard and will promote deep listening to Gunaikurnai perspectives as discussions about changes to land and sea Country take place.
- Sustainability best practice will be pursued in the delivery of the Conference.
- The Conference will feel local and welcoming to promote connection and a desire to build a future for Gippsland; “we are all in this together” for the bnefit of the region.
- Building stronger relationships between people that attend will be a focus and facilitated.
- While the conference will include all forms and usages of New Energy, there is a special focus on Gippsland Offshore Wind with its associated social, cultural, environmental, and industrial implications. The focus of the conference will be “New Energy”, defined as the energy obtained from renewable resources that refill over time.
- The conference differentiates from other big city conferences that provide status updates, consultant views and product reviews. Speakers at this conference will dig a bit deeper about the difference that projects, initiatives and policies will make, and the experience as we transition in Gippsland.
- Local businesses and service providers will be engaged and highlighted, demonstrating Gippsland’s capacity to solve the needs of proponents.
- The mix of attendees is positioned to be approximately 40% industry, 30% Government, 20% community and 10% education/students/young people.
- Co-design of the conference program and participation in the lead up to the conference will ensure the conference is embraced locally.

Our Sponsors

PLATINUM PARTNER

Offshore Wind Energy Victoria & VicGrid

VICTORIA State Government | Energy, Environment and Climate Action

PLATINUM STREAMING PARTNER

AGL Loy Yang

agl

GOLD PARTNERS

BlueFloat ENERGY

CORIO

LATROBE CITY

Ørsted

Regional Development Australia GIPPSLAND

WELLINGTON SHIRE COUNCIL

THE MIDDLE OF EVERYWHERE

GOLD COMMUNITY PARTNER

Iberdrola Australia | A Brighter Future

GOLD SUSTAINABILITY PARTNER

Star of the South

Our Sponsors

SILVER PARTNERS

Loy Yang B Power Station
Australian Government Department of Industry, Science and Resources AusIndustry
AusNet Renewable Energy Zone
Australian
Bank Australia
CarbonNet Project Enabling a Net Zero Future
Committee for GIPPSLAND
ELECSOME
Federation University
Food & Fibre Gippsland
FLOTATION ENERGY
GCCN
KIMA
LATROBE VALLEY AUTHORITY
Marathon Futures Industries DEVELOPING THE FUTURE
MARINUS LINK
NGH
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT VICTORIA
REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS GIPPSLAND
Solar Victoria
South Gippsland Shire Council
TAFE GIPPSLAND
TAFE VICTORIA

BRONZE PARTNERS

EARTHWORKER ENERGY MANUFACTURING COOPERATIVE
EAST GIPPSLAND
EnergyAustralia
Gippsland Water
ICN Victoria

OTHER PARTNERS

Nanoo Nanoo ARTS · COMMUNICATIONS · MEDIA
THE WEDGE PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE
th. TINAMBA HOTEL

Conference by Numbers

546 **Total Registrations:**
507 In person attendees
39 remote

458 **Whova Downloads**

2672 **Messages sent**

109 **Speakers**

280 **Students attended** (estimate)

Community Day (estimated) **350**

Sessions **51**

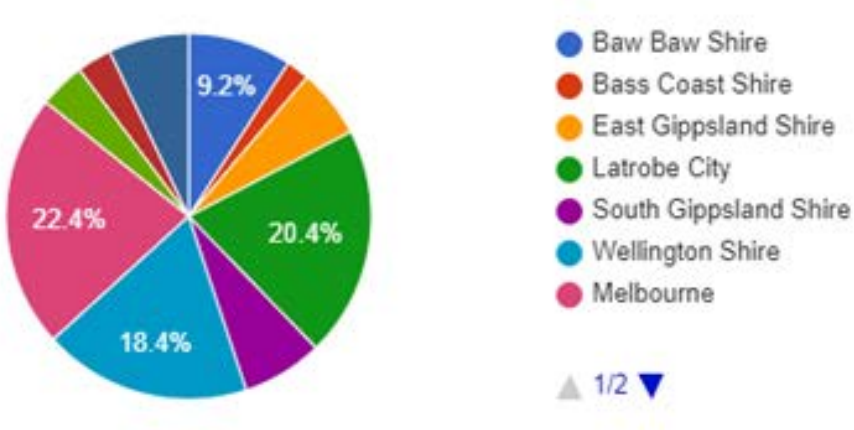
Sponsors **42**

Direct Turnover **$328K**

Indirect Turnover (estimated) **$400K**

Survey Chacteristics

98 Conference attendees responded to the survey, roughly 20% (some online attendance) and 20 sponsors, roughly 50% from a variety of locations:



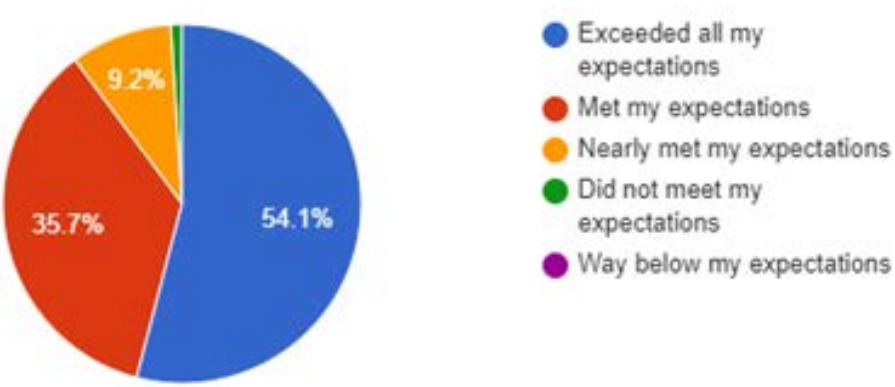
Many of the respondents were from Gippsland (63.2%) with 22.4% from Melbourne. The rest were from Regional Victoria (4.1%), Interstate (7.1%) and International (3.1%)

Survey Responses

1. Layout, timing and style

The Conference was distributed over a precinct arrangement with sessions distributed between the WEDGE Entertainment Centre and the Port of Sale building featuring breakout rooms and open spaces to encourage networking.

Question: To what extent did this conference meet your expectations?



89.8% of respondents indicated the conference met or exceeded their expectations. This is about the same as GNEC22 (89.6%). Some of the key takeaways from the respondents:

"Real information, real engagement"

"Change is coming and needs to come fast. Genuine and empathetic community engagement is essential."

"GLaWAC engagement"

"The planning and approvals pathway for offshore wind projects was incredibly insightful. The environmental assessments completed and duration in which they were undertaken was very eye opening. Very interesting and meaningful work being completed by these companies."

"Networking with people and the collective energy generated."

"I think all bases were covered this year - the breakout rooms worked well. I also enjoyed the panel with the local passionate farmers - it's important we're across the challenges too."

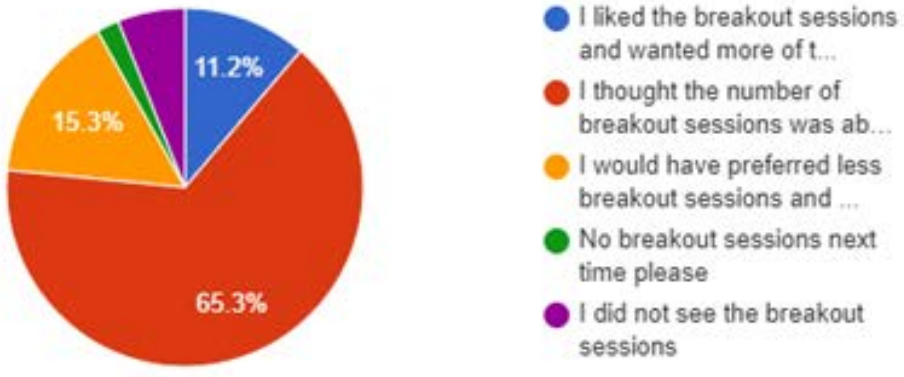
"Gippsland leadership, collaboration, authentic listening to community voices."

"The location at the Port of Sale and use of breakout rooms."

All sessions were well supported with many delegates choosing to gather, connect and network outside of the formal presentations. There was a "precinct" feel about the 2023 conference with informal spaces contained within the conference setup where delegates could gather, drink coffee or hold a small meeting if they needed to. The foyer of the WEDGE, the stairs at the Port of Sale for example.

Several people commented that GNEC23 was different to similar conference with the welcoming atmosphere and the community involvement. It wasn't the "same old faces" and "suits talking to suits".

Question: The Conference was a mix of plenary sessions in the main theatre and smaller breakout sessions. What was your impression of this format?



76.5% of respondents liked the breakout sessions or wanted more of them with the majority thinking the mix was about right. Some commented that they did not like the clash of popular sessions.

"It was frustrating having to choose between breakout sessions and then having to miss out on something you also wanted to attend. Some sessions were crowded and started before everyone arrived.".

Some other responses:

"Would be great to: 1. run thematic engagement streams across the conference days - it felt like engagement related topics were clustered at the same time but they could be spread out across streams e.g. engagement, for developers, etc 2. have more breaks to allow more networking time, and front ending this on the first day is great as that's when people have the most energy to connect with others 3. main conference ending on the Thursday to allow travel time, more attendance at post-conf sessions".

"Please don't hold in the same week as GWEC again - from a resourcing perspective it was hectic! GWEC2024 is in Sth Korea next year so please keep this in mind when setting the date."

"Maybe a keynote speaker of some recognition"

"Brilliant format"

In its second year the conference has confirmed its role as a leading Regional New Energy event that is a powerful mechanism in developing networks, advocacy and education. As one respondent mentioned:

"I've been to the conference both years now. The local focus is great and you would not want to lose that, but it is also a bona fide national conference on the annual calendar. Next year, I'd like to see it be more confident that is national conference but hosted regionally. For instance, it is probably the premier offshore wind event of anywhere in the country. Government Ministers should be strongly encouraged to attend in person and you could consider international keynotes to build profile."

Interest in the conference was high with attendance selling out within the week of tickets going on sale and a waiting list of over 100 people with many giving up and not registering. With over 450 attendees on each day, facilities, staff, volunteers and catering was stretched to the limit.

Upon reflection, "bigger is not necessarily better" and that future conferences should consider what is a manageable size. Implementing size limits on organisations and businesses allows more diversity whilst not restricting the number of tickets available to the community which is our key point of difference.

87.8% of respondents said the timing of the conference was either convenient or very convenient with only one person saying it was inconvenient. It would be an advantage having it away from Federal and State Parliamentary sitting days.

Day 2 falling on a Friday meant there was a steady exodus during the day as people made their way back home and only a few dozen remained by the last session. A lot of people were leaving to start their weekend early, return travel to home/work location or catch flights. As one respondent explained:

Friday afternoon sessions went too late in the day. Made it difficult for people with long drives home. Suggest concluding at Friday lunchtime. And perhaps start on Wed afternoon/evening.

Recommendation One

a. Continue GNEC in 2024.

b. Look for a location that provides a “Precinct Style” atmosphere that encourages informal gatherings within professional conference surroundings.

c. Position the conference in early September and away from GWEC24 in Sth Korea. Try to avoid State and Federal Parliamentary sittings to maximise the potential for Ministers to appear.

d. Consider running the conference on a Wednesday and Thursday with the Youth Summit on the Friday and the Community event on the Friday night.

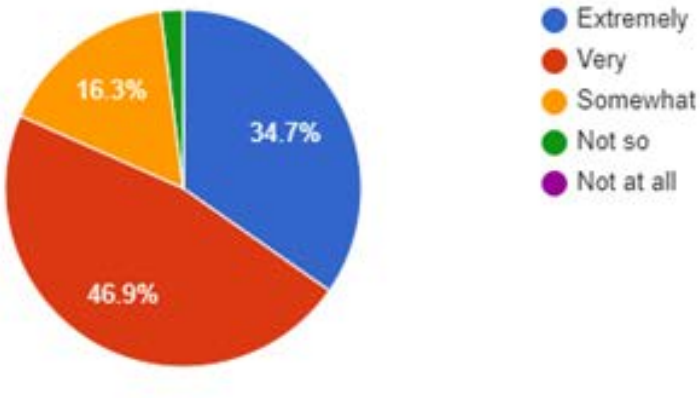
e. In considering the attendees:

- i. Restrict the numbers to a manageable size by a limit on the numbers from each organization
- ii. Continue to provide tickets to the community through sponsorship, reduced rates and preferential availability.
- iii. Retain a Gippsland and Regional Flavour
- iv. Develop our connection to First Nations
- v. Continue Plenary and breakout session model with conference dinner on first night.

f. Lift the expectation that this has become a significant National event with the involvement of Federal and State Ministers and significant high-profile speakers.

2) Content

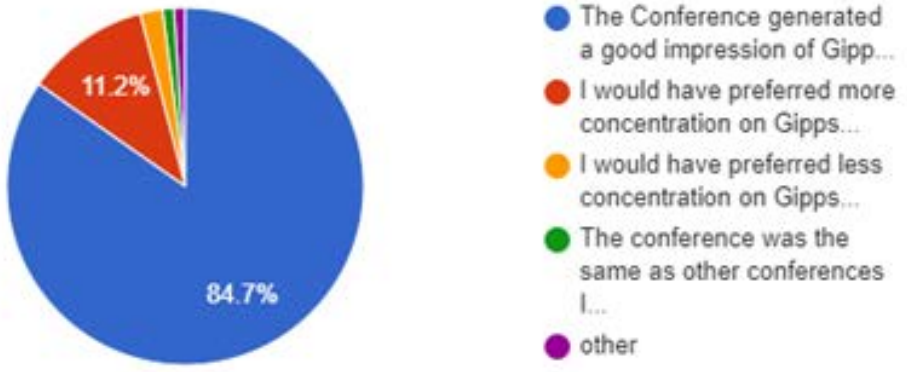
Question: How useful was the content presented at the conference?



81.6% of respondents found the content presented at the conference to be very or extremely useful.

The program was developed by an extensive working group and devolved to key facilitators to organise or manage speakers. Sponsors and industry representatives were approached early to provide speakers and given direction to move away from company speaking points and information you can find on websites to provide a more personalised reflection.

Question: The Conference aimed to have a local flavour promoting a desire to build a New Energy future for Gippsland. Can you tell us your impressions of this?



The overwhelming majority of respondents appreciated the Gippsland focus.

Other responses

"Opportunities to develop community knowledge and understanding of renewable energy, how it works, and to build the overall literacy level of Gippslanders in order to help increase acceptance of the projects and their benefits. Also enjoyed focus on business supply chain options for our local industries and workforce!"

"Offshore wind opportunities and coordination of resources required to implement."

"More on energy efficiency and smaller energy projects eg rooftop solar or small scale wind farms"

"Bio energy, bio digesters"

"A bit more on rehabilitation (mine rehabilitation)"

"How/ what has or is working to help people with disadvantage get real benefit from this shift to RE?"

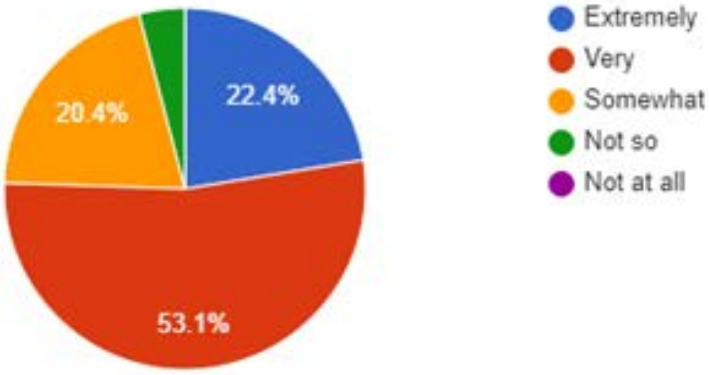
With the offshore licences to be awarded later this year, the GNEC24 is likely to concentrate less on offshore wind and more on local supply, training and transmission infrastructure.

Recommendation Two

That a working group be developed early in 2024 to actively curate GNEC content with a Gippsland focus. Panel sessions be encouraged with a variety of diverse speakers to provide a deep dive into the issues raised. Being a sponsor does not guarantee you a speaking spot.

3) Asking questions and the Whova app

Question: How comfortable were you to ask questions at the conference?



Most people (75.5%) felt very or extremely comfortable in asking questions during the conference. Whilst some indicated a reluctance to use the app (6%) there were 458 downloads which was significant. Some commented on the "annoying notifications" in the weeks leading up while others were impressed with the contacts and ability to promote their business or organisation.

In the breakout sessions some respondents felt we did not need to use the app.

"Using the app to ask and answer questions in some of the break-out sessions I feel really detracted from the interaction between the audience and the panel. In the smaller rooms, it would have been easy to ask questions directly of the presenters without using the app. This creates more of a conversational style, which I feel is warmer and more direct, rather than reading from a screen when the person is sitting in the room a few meters away."

There was a problem connecting people to the app if their e-mail was not registered or registered incorrectly. In the weeks leading up to the conference there was significant number of alterations to the people attending and even on the day, participants arrived that were not listed in the app. We should consider a hard cutoff for changes to personnel.

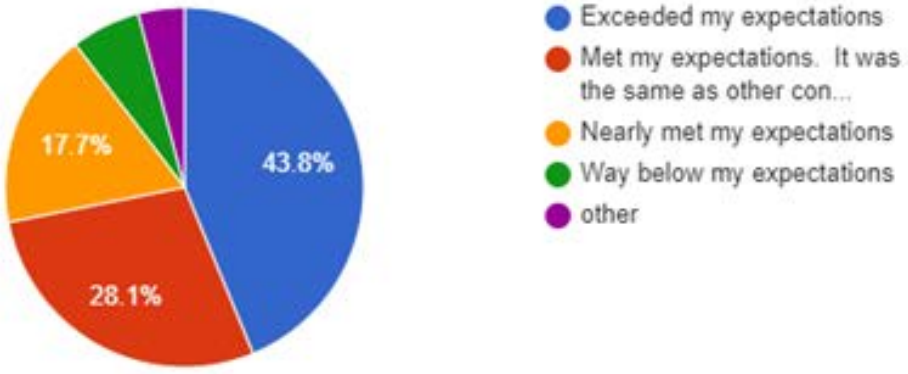
Recommendation Three

The Whova app be retained for GNEC 2024 with administrators looking to:

a. Bring the Whova app online only two weeks prior.
b. Find a way to use anonymous settings for asking questions.
c. Less focus on the “leader board” that often provides benefits for fake meet ups and manufactured conversations.
d. Create a low impact leader board to encourage sustainable practices.
e. Consider a hard cutoff for changes to personnel to ensure connection to the app.

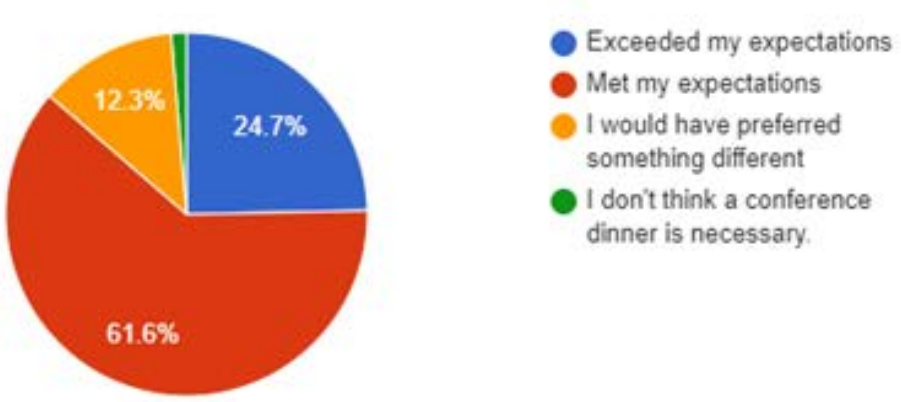
4) Catering and the Conference Dinner

Question: To what extent did the catering at the conference meet your expectations?



71.9% of respondents replied that the catering at the conference either met their expectations or exceeded expectations. There were issues with delivery on lunch on the first day but this was quickly solved by that afternoon break and there were no problems on the second day.

Question: To what extent was the dinner a valuable addition to the conference?



86.3% felt the conference dinner either met or exceeded their expectations. With the large numbers the timing of the meals was tight and the space was constrained so some commented it was hard to move about. There was some comment, like last year, that the speakers on the stage were hard to hear.

It was very difficult to determine who was attending the conference dinner and their dietary requirements. Around 100 people did not respond, despite repeated e-mails, and we consequently overcatered by around 20 meals for the conference dinner.

Some responses:

"The catering was fantastic, maybe have more glassware available next time. But the staff were lovely, it was great."

"Non alcoholic beer would have been good"

"The food needed better labelling for people with dietary requirements"

"Loved the increased care re sustainability. Liked the availability ++of coffee!!"

"There was too much meat, some folks had beef entry and lamb dinner, it would have been nice to mix that up and include dessert. It was definitely delicious."

"Despite generally being nice food, the way the 'dietaries' were lumped together was not very helpful. There was usually a table or area labelled dietaries, but it was difficult to tell what, if anything, was gluten free, what was vegan, what was dairy free etc. I know there are a lot of different food sensitivities these days, but given how serious the consequences of eating something you are allergic to can be, it was quite frustrating."

"Great good and service. A great display of the foods grown locally, well done Tinamba Hotel and team!!"

There was positive comment about the connection with local food producers who with the assistance of Food and Fibre Gippsland created a video explaining the source of the locally grown produce.

Recommendation Four

A single overall coordinator of the catering should be appointed to ensure:

a) The Conference provide high quality food and drink options from local providers.
b) We deliver a range of well labelled dietary options.
c) We continue to promote low impact practices and utilise food waste appropriately.

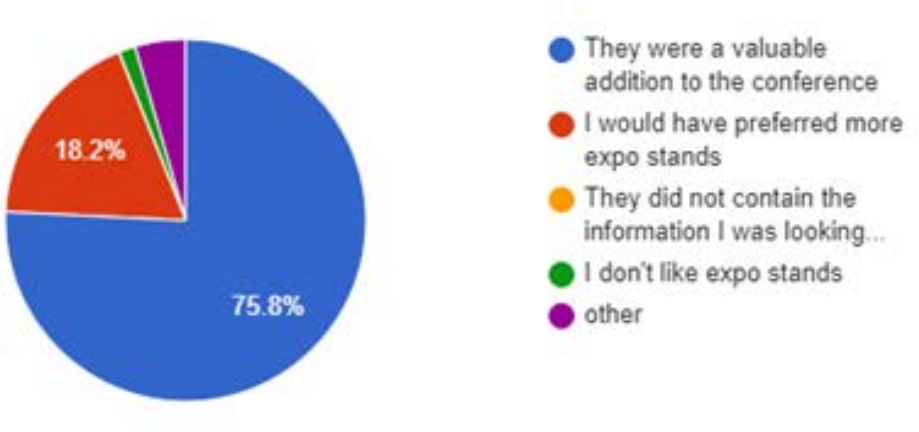
The Conference dinner on the first night should be a "conference staple" however consider opportunities to move the participants around and restrict the dinner entertainment to a sponsor welcome and background music.

5) Expo Sites

The expo sites (or business displays) were in the WEDGE foyer and in two locations in the Port of Sale. With many attendees and limited space there was constraints in their presentation although 67% of respondents said they visited the expo sites.

There was often a disconnect between the business contact and those on the ground managing the stall as to their requirements and obligations. Some businesses expressed a difficulty in staffing their stall.

Question: Can you tell us your impression of the information provided?



A large number of attendee responses (94%) thought they were a valuable addition or would have preferred more expo stands. For the exhibitors, 85% said they had an expo site and 65% saying there were happy with the site. 3 respondents thought they needed more publicity and 1 was not happy with their site.

For large conference in capital cities, sponsors are asked to contract hire companies to provide the infrastructure. For example, it cost Gippsland representatives $2946 with Harry the Hirer for materials for the site at the APAC Offshore Wind & Green Hydrogen Summit (GWEC)

Some responses:

"The exhibit area was small and if bigger would provide more opportunities for even better engagement"

"With the majority of presentations at the Wedge, we felt that the stall was a bit superfluous. Particularly as we were trying to also attend the break out presentations and not always available at the stall in the afternoons."

"Suggest if planning a similar format (it worked well across the two buildings) to add a visual / plan / photo of the layouts early on day one in the main room, demonstrating who is where and how to get there."

"I think having the sites were good especially to have a presence even if we weren't able to attend the whole time or have it manned. I think possibly having some more time for people to visit the sites or even just making it a little more clear during the conference could help with networking and exposure."

"I enjoyed seeing the earth worker heat pump in real life and having a chance to ask about how it worked."

Whilst the positioning of the Expo sites were an improvement on last year, the sponsors preference is to locate them in the one spot or clearly indicate where they are located.

Recommendation Five

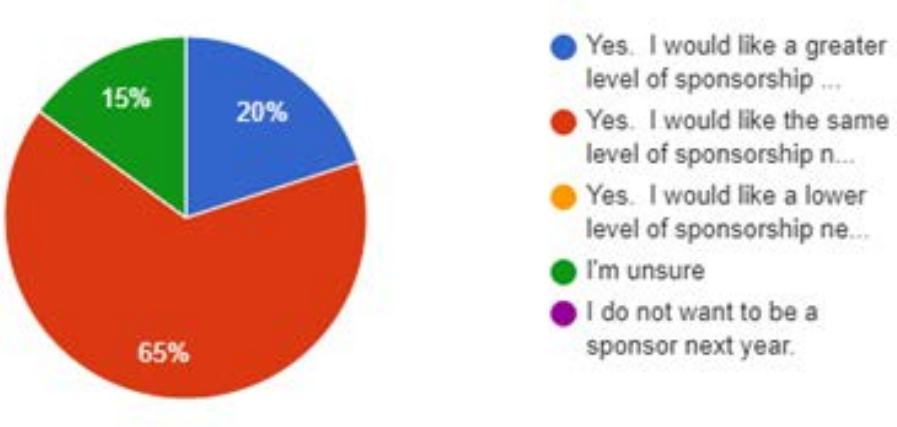
The Expo sites are a valuable addition to the conference and need to be encouraged by locating them in the one place where possible and/or clearly indicate where each is located.

a. Managing the expectation of the expo providers by providing clear guidelines and requirements.
b. Provide ticketing options so that expo providers can have staff for their sites during the conference sessions.

6) Sponsors

There was 2 Platinum, 8 Gold, 24 Silver, 5 Bronze and 3 additional sponsors. 100% of the sponsors responses said the conference had the right level of decision-makers for their product or service. 90% of the sponsors said the conference met or exceeded their expectations.

Question: Would you be interested in being a sponsor next year?



The Wellington Shire was a Gold sponsor ($10,000) but also provided over $15,000 of direct sponsorship through venue hire and more in staff time. In future the host should be considered at least a Platinum level sponsor.

"There has been a lot in the education space, which has been appropriate for the past 2 years, but given next year feasibility licences will be issued and we will have greater understanding of the key few developers, I would like to promote local supply chain and value chain in greater numbers. A larger expo for manufacturing/engineering companies of Gippsland to promote themselves to key decision makers. Future problems being addressed in greater detail would also be good to explore further."

"I think the sponsors received great recognition of their support. Compared to other Conferences, it was also very affordable. The expo space at the Wellington Centre was a little crammed but I appreciate the space restrictions. The highlight for our sponsorship investment was having our CEO attend and present - thank you for the opportunity."

The sponsors provide more than funding, they connected to speakers, publicised the conference, gave it credibility and were valued partners.

The sponsorship packages were very affordable compared to similar conferences. This led to them being highly subscribed, which caused some administrative issues around promoting involvement, allocating key parts of the event to gold sponsors etc.

Recommendation Six

The Conference continues to maintain a close relationship with sponsors as valued partners in its presentation. The sponsorship package values and inclusions should be reviewed in 2024 to ensure that there's strong partnership and involvement but it's also easier to coordinate and deliver.

7) Sustainability

The Conference partnered with Star of the South to look at ways to lower its impact on the environment. David Hood and his team are to be complemented on their dedication.

A final sustainability report is attached with some points to note:

- Need to plan better for bins and educating people. There were lots of food (green) bins scattered on day one, although they ended up with coffee cups and other things in them as well. Fewer bin locations and all options available worked better (but not perfectly). Bin police would work event better.
- Lots of cup sorting required. Once other coffee cups were brought in, they had to be separated and removed from the compostable ones.
- Boomerang Bags were a hit!

- Water refill stations were well utilised 417 litres used through one fountain – other ones didn't have figures, either not working, memory failed or they didn't record.
- Suggest that a waste coordinator be appointed to manage the process of bin placement, signage, promotion and collection throughout the whole event.
- Suggest that future events consider recruiting students in a work experience capacity who can assist with event sustainability and waste management. This would include preparation activities (venue layout, bin placement, signage), during the event education (standing beside bins), sorting and collection – would suit those with a strong interest in event management or sustainability/environment.
- We can explore and instigate better promotion for how attendees can be a part of a low-impact conference. This would be through pre-event comms and social media, sponsor advice; BYO water and coffee cup, take public transport, car pool etc
- Find ways to reward and recognise attendees for embracing the low-impact theme, perhaps a bigger recognition if they promote what they are doing and encourage others to do so as well – like the Whova leaderboard.
- Need to promote public transport options in subsequent conferences and to encourage Melbourne based people to use the train.
- Choose more vegetable based catering options.

There was a response on the survey *"Not a suggestion but a compliment on the sustainability aspects of the event - by far, the best attempt at reducing waste I've seen at an event of this size. Well done."*

Recommendation Seven

That the Conference create a separate sustainability subcommittee that continues to develop sustainable practices. The sustainability processes from the conference be written up into a brief guide that can be shared with other Gippsland organisations and events as a best practice model to learn from and build on.

8) Youth Summit

GNEC22 had a small number of students (20+) attend day one of the conference which in GNEC23 evolved to a full day of activities on the Wednesday at the Sale Memorial Hall. Around 380 students attended from several local schools and from East Gippsland.

There has been a debrief with the working party and they were overjoyed with the success and a call out to thank all the stakeholders and proponents for their efforts. Thank you to Shannon Egan, Ash Hall, Jaide Stevens and Mandy Neave with their team for the efforts in pulling this together so comprehensively.

Great student feedback including one note from a student participant:

"Initially when I first arrived at the Sale Hall, I didn't know what to expect. I thought there would be a few speeches and we would ask some questions, and then return to school. However, once you entered the Hall, there were stalls lined up throughout the entire area, each representing something different or with a creative idea to get the students involved.

There were brochures on how to present yourself in a job interview, information on renewable energies, quizzes on how much you knew and your thoughts on the world as it was, and much more. The stalls also gave out lots of different things for free, specifically assortments of lollies and pens. There was even a stall that allowed you try out some VR and allowed you to keep a hat from their stall.

Towards the end, there was an interview with four women from renewable energy businesses, where they explained how they got to where they are now, and their struggles along the way. The people in charge of the interview got people in the crowd to ask questions. I learnt a lot about renewable energy, specifically about how some companies store CO2 under the earth in little pockets.

Overall, the experience was fun, inviting, and taught me quite a lot. I'm very appreciative that I was allowed to go, and if I had the chance, I would do so again."

There is a desire to expand the Youth Summit and to continue this on a separate day. There can also be more involvement by young people in the conference with student ambassadors from Youth Councils plus Federation University and TAFE students connecting with proponents and community leaders. Free tickets could be offered to ensure a group of young people attend.

Recommendation Eight

That the Youth Summit on a separate day is a key component of any Gippsland New Energy Conference. Student representatives should also be given the opportunity to attend the other days, appear on panels and contribute to the broader discussion through a sponsorship program.

9) Online GNEC+ Streaming

GNEC23 had 39 people register as online attendees through the Whova app and up to 200+ accessing the conference stream free through the website.

The sessions were not recorded and were unavailable after the live streaming. There were several positive comments from online participants although also a disappointment that not all breakout sessions were streamed. It raised the possibility of using the streaming platform GNEC+ to increase the participation and knowledge of the conference themes.

The online conference could have its own compere, panellists and introduce special targeted sessions running parallel to the main conference such as an online Q&A with a conference speaker and a daily update about what is happening on the conference floor.

With the permission of the speakers, sessions could be recorded and made available for a brief time after the conference.

Recommendation Nine

To cater for the numbers of people who want to access the conference to create a serious online GNEC+ streaming service, separately curated and with an online host.

10) Community Day

The Community Day happened from 10am – 2pm on the Saturday morning at the Port of Sale with around 250 – 300 participants moving through science shows, offshore wind panel sessions, film presentations and an eV expo.

Sponsored by Iberdrola Australia the event attracted those with a genuine interest in renewable energy delivered in a comfortable, family friendly atmosphere.

Not only does the community day attract interest in renewable energy it promotes the values of proponents listening to and considering the views of our community. That the Gippsland New Energy Conference is more than something of interest for the big end of town.

However, on reflection the Saturday morning is a difficult time to attract families with fatigue from a busy week and competing sporting activities and other events.

Recommendation Ten

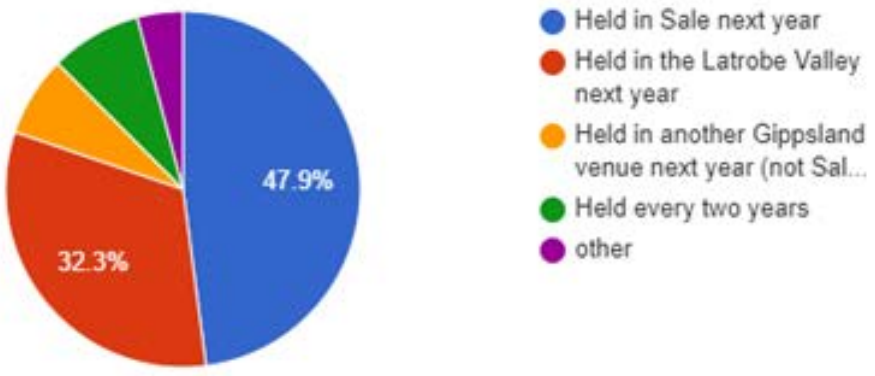
That we continue the Community Expo as part of the program for 2024 but look to trial it on a Friday night say 5.30pm – 8.30pm with food trucks and a high-profile guest speaker.

11) Location for 2024

Sale responded well to the challenges of hosting a large regional conference and utilising the Port of Sale and WEDGE precinct provided the perfect backdrop. The Wellington Shire provided exceptional support for the Conference.

Being able to easily walk from your accommodation and options for after conference activities close by – the late night Karaoke at Jack Ryans Hotel and the music at the Criterion Hotel were favourites – adds to the networks being created.

Question: What is your preference for timing and location for future Gippsland New Energy Conferences?



The majority of respondents had a preference for returning to Sale next year although there was significant support for other locations as explained by the response (it should be) *"held every year and give the opportunity to another town centre. Sale did a great job though!!!"*

There are significant advantages of hosting the conference with a direct financial contribution of $328,000 and an indirect contribution of an estimated $400,000.

Two thirds of the respondents said they paid for one or more nights accommodation with reports that the closest accommodation remaining on the Thursday night was in the Latrobe Valley.

More significantly it allows proponents and industry connections to assess and appreciate the town ahead of what will be substantial investments in years to come. Branding the location as the centre of New Energy brings advantages beyond the immediate cash injection.

Considering the requirements for a precinct location with professional conference facilities, room for expo stalls, close by the accommodation options and space for breakout rooms, these locations could be considered for GNEC24:

1. Churchill Campus of Federation University.
2. Kernot Hall Precinct.
3. Gippsland Performing Arts Centre and Town Hall Precinct.
4. WEDGE and the Port of Sale.

Recommendation Eleven

The Gippsland New Energy Coordination Group should assess the possible locations for GNEC24 under the criteria described deciding a location before the end of the year.

12) Other Points

A collection of responses that don't quite fit within the framework.

- I think there could have been more representation from Traditional Owners views and voice. There was little to no Traditional Owners on the panels but plenty of people up there talking about what they think traditional owners want or need.

- Include an onshore energy focus. he development of offshore wind will take a minimum of 10 years before construction starts. We need to start transition earlier to both meet energy targets, provide local opportunities, and training of the workforce essential for our transition, including into offshore wind. I am aware of the local challenges of onshore wind (Alberton WF). There is an opportunity to provide a forum to discuss community challenges and investigate how we can meet community needs.

- Government grants, rebates and startup support schemes should be highlighted.

- I would love to see a focus on reducing energy use, examples of geographical grouping of businesses where the waste stream of one is the source material for the next door business etc etc.

- The majority of respondents (68.4%) said that Gippsland was prepared or very prepared for New Energy development.

- 94.5% of respondents said the tickets prices were either inexpensive or what they would have expected to pay.

- The number of repeats of acknowledgement to country was ridiculous, came across as tokenistic and disrespectful. There must be another way to balance the expectations that public servants and politicians must acknowledge country without having a -ve impact.

- The local Port tours worked well and it would be nice to include them again next year.

- Recognise the importance of the GLaWAC “speed dating” session on the Wednesday which allowed proponents one on one time with traditional owners.

- Teal vests for event staff worked well. We were identifiable and people could approach them with questions or for assistance.

Sustainability Report GNEC23

In 2023 the Gippsland New Energy Conference committed to being a more sustainable, low-impact event. When using the low-impact label, we mean that our decisions and actions have a low-level impact upon the environment and resources.

It means being more responsible with what we source, what we produce, what we hand out and how we run the event. Recognising that renewable energy is only part of the bigger picture when it comes to lowering our impact on the environment, Star of the South have joined us as this year's Sustainability Sponsor. Their help means that we can go that extra step in being more sustainable.

In Australia an estimated 27.5 million tonnes of waste disposal went into landfill last year, recorded by the National Waste Report 2022. We aimed to divert material such as organic matter away from landfills to prevent uncaptured methane production, by capturing this gas in a controlled setting it allows for alternative uses such as energy.

Water conservation is another way of reducing environmental impact. Sustainability Victoria reports that we purchase almost 15 billion plastic water bottles every year in Australia and by implementing the Gippsland Water refill stations we could prevent contributing to purchasing this single use plastic.

These types of statistics highlight the importance of sustainable conferences and events as we move toward a low-impact future. This year we took on the challenge of searching for better options and asking suppliers the tricky questions when procuring items and preparing for the conference.

Below is a list of the steps and changes that we made for the conference.

1) Showbags for attendees

Using recycled materials and better gifts, in 2022 the conference provided showbags for attendees. These were given out at the end of day 1 and was the catalyst for moving towards a low-impact approach in 2023.

Some attendees looked in the showbags and decided that they didn't need what was included and politely declined. When a working group member checked the contents, they had many plastic and single use items inside.

Given that GNEC aims to steer us towards an energy generation landscape with minimal emissions and improved human and environmental outcomes, running a conference that minimises waste and reduces the number of resources required to run it was a logical direction for 2023.

- This year we partnered with local Boomerang Bags groups to provide the showbags for the event. These groups are run by volunteers who create reusable bags from donated fabric waste. These groups provided us with hundreds of colourful, quality bags that are an exemplar of re-using materials and adding that extra story when you next use the bag. Thanks to the following Boomerang Bags groups; Baw Baw, Phillip Island and San Remo, Sunbury and Twin Rivers. For more information on the great work of Boomerang Bags, please visit: boomerangbags.org

- Prior to selecting Boomerang Bags as our bag supplier, we were investigating multiple options for procuring bags. When suppliers couldn't provide Conference transparency over production details or provide further details to back up the supposed sustainability credentials of their chosen materials we decided not to consider their options. We also took the opportunity to provide that feedback to a supplier so they knew that they couldn't satisfy our low-impact requirements. We did this in the hope that it's one example of expressing what consumers want from suppliers and hopefully others will follow.

2) Showbag items

We developed a set of guidelines that challenged our sponsors to steer away from single use plastic, or items that come wrapped in plastic, and focus on re-useable items - even sourcing more responsible materials for the items that they place in showbags this year.

Showbag merch/swag guidelines and principles GNEC sponsors aim to source or provide:-

- Items that are not wrapped in plastic (either in the showbag or from the supplier);
- Items that are manufactured by local Gippsland suppliers (first preference), or sourced through/from local suppliers (second preference) – we understand that this isn't always possible, but we want them to support local as much as possible;
- Reusable items (preferably not plastic derived);
- Consumable items (local produce – with sponsor branding added);
- Circular economy appropriate items (eg grow pencils, seed infused paper);
- Sponsor donation – sponsor makes a donation to a local Landcare group or sustainability group that contributes to a project, initiative or event. This is similar to a gift on your behalf that charities offer. A card is placed in the showbag detailing the donation (which group and what initiative is being supported) that would have the sponsors logo/branding and details on it (card could be seed infused paper that can be planted at a later date).

Some sponsors chose to not purchase items for the show bags and instead support local conservation groups. This includes financial support towards nearby Landcare Groups that will help local farmers and conservation.

3) Seeded paper

The conference featured multiple examples of seeded paper. Knowing that there were certain items at the conference that would be hard to achieve without using paper the team wanted to trial something different. This would be an approach that could involve some action and learning after the conference was over.

We decided to use seeded paper for attendee name tags as well as a small flyer promoting the low-impact approach of the event.

- The seeded paper was chosen as it could cut down on waste paper and be repurposed following the conference, with an opportunity to provide food for attendees. One sponsor, Orsted, also embraced the idea and added a seeded-paper flyer to the participant showbags infused with Swan River Daisy seeds.

The seeded paper organised through the working group was sourced through Black Rainbow Printing, to see their environmental credentials and sustainable printing practices, please visit: blackrainbow.com.au

4) Coffee cups

Knowing that coffee and other hot drinks are a key part of networking during conferences, we wanted to ensure that there was a better option available than the standard single-use, disposable coffee cup. The team researched possible options and short listed two home compostable options; a paper-based cup and a cup made from food waste.

Home compostable was chosen as this was an option that attendees could take home and trial in their own compost bins, or if it made its way into landfill, it could break down over time without harming the environment.

Both options had received certification from the Australian Bioplastics Association having passed a certification process.

- Our team tested the cups to make sure that they would be suitable for the event; both holding hot beverages and breaking down in home compost settings.

Check out more on the cups here: iamnotpaper.com

5) Water fountains and bottle refill stations

The working group organised to have drinking fountains and bottle refill stations setup at both the Youth Summit and the Gippsland New energy Conference.

These would provide attendees with the opportunity to either drink from or refill their own water bottles. This would reduce the need for attendees to find and purchase bottled water throughout the event.

The drinking fountains and bottle refill stations were kindly provided by Gippsland Water at no cost as part of their community engagement program.

Recommendations

BYO keep Cups and water bottles; the event had limited promotion and advertising that it was BYO friendly. Although this was promoted via the Whova app in the low-impact section, in photos as well as an attendee poll (hidden in one part of the Whova app) it is recommended that we increase the encouragement and promotion of bringing along keep Cups and water bottles.

6) Lanyards

We chose bamboo as the material for our lanyards and coupled those with bio-wallets (that will hold your name tag). This was recommended after this combination had been used at the Social Enterprise World Forum in 2022.

The bio-wallets had been listed in the eco-friendly range and marketed as biodegradable. While it does break down in anaerobic digestion it was found after purchasing this option that they are made from the same materials as traditional plastic, i.e., fossil fuels.

Our intent shifted to collect the lanyards and bio-wallets at the end of the conference so that they could be re-used (or in need be, recycled).

7) Food leftovers

To ensure that unused, edible food could still be consumed we partnered with the local Food Bank in Sale so that it could be distributed to those in need.

We also partnered with Green Lab Futures to collect and use food scraps from the event. Food scraps were processed through biogas units to produce a liquid fertiliser and harness and utilise the biogas created.

GNEC 2023 low impact initiative, partnered with Star of the South and was a huge success on last year's conference! This year we were able to introduce sustainable practices throughout the conference.

The data we captured will provide a benchmark for our future sustainable conferences and events, it highlighted what we did well and what we can improve on.

What we did well

- Reusable Boomerang Bags made with donated materials.
- Fully compostable coffee cups made from reclaimed plant and veggie by-product.
- Water refill stations provided, with one station producing 417 litres to attendees. That equates to 695 drink bottles at 600ml!
- Name tags and promotional material printed on recycled seed paper.
- Lanyards and name tag covers returned by attendees for use in future conferences. We received 41% of the lanyards at our collection point.
- Waste sorting bins provided throughout the conference to sort waste, recyclable and compostable product.
- We provided sponsors with recommendations to guide them in sourcing alternative materials and products for their promotional material.
- Vendors reduced handouts and had engaging, hands on experiences to initiate conversation.

What we will continue to do

- Educating the stall holders on sustainable materials provided to attendees to continue the reduction in plastic material.
- Share our low impact learnings from the conference with our extended network, stakeholders, and community to assist their future events.

What we can do better

- The implementation of a Sustainability Coordinator.
- Waste educators at the bins during the conference to minimise contamination, potential for student work experience.
- Increase the education, promotion, and discussion of a sustainable conference to attendee's pre-conference and during the conference as well as onboarding all contractors.
- Record keeping of all material generated and disposed.
- Retrieve feedback in the survey from the participants about sustainability.
- Utilise café glassware for a reduction in coffee cup usage.
- More collection points for lanyards to increase the number returned.
- Consider alternative materials or options for the lanyards and name tag sleeve.
- Encouraging the attendees to utilise public transport and carpooling with electric vehicles (EV) where available. Potential for EV transfers from train station to Conference venue.

What we will improve

- A temporary waste holding location to prevent waste being left at locations and to hold in the instance it cannot be relocated during the conference days.
- Waste educators at the bins during the conference to minimise contamination.
- Find ways to recognise attendees that embrace the low impact conference.

*Amounts estimated based on data collected.