

Greening the West

Greening the West is an example of a successful regional scale urban greening and cooling collaboration, demonstrating equity in adapting to climate change in Melbourne’s booming western suburbs. Greater Western Water’s role has been more than their core business of water and sewerage provision – but to lead and galvanise a broad coalition of stakeholders with similar drivers, provide water expertise and alternative water sources for the greening effort, as well as assist in delivering significant community benefits.

CLIMATE THEMES ADDRESSED



CUSTOMERS +
COMMUNITY



CUSTOMERS +
COMMUNITY



CLIMATE
HAZARDS



EQUITABLE
RESPONSES
TO CLIMATE
ADAPTATION

Background

Melbourne’s western suburbs are some of the fastest growing in Australia. They receive around half the rainfall of Melbourne’s eastern suburbs, and can experience warmer daytime temperatures. Climate change is expected to exacerbate this further. Given their location on Victoria’s volcanic plain, the natural vegetation originally supported grasslands rather than dense canopy cover – this means that the overall canopy cover is one of the lowest in the country. Community health is also a significant driver, with issues such as diabetes and obesity compounding the challenges of population growth, climate change and heat stress.

Green and blue infrastructure is a low-cost strategy to improve access to high quality, irrigated green space that can bring high impact results – environmentally, economically and for the health and wellbeing of the residents who live there.

Greening the West is an initiative established in 2011 by City West Water (now Greater Western Water) to deliver positive health, social and liveability outcomes in Melbourne’s western suburbs. It was created as an alliance of 23 organisations, including local governments, water utilities and community groups with a desire to use green and blue infrastructure to drive these outcomes.

The program is underpinned by Greater Western Water’s Stormwater Partnership Fund, established in 2018, which helps the local governments involved in the program not only to plant trees and use alternative water to irrigate them, but to leverage funding from other sources including government, the health sector and the philanthropic sector.

The Greening the West collaboration aims to achieve the following medium to long term goals:

- 25% increase in alternative water for green space by 2030
- Double tree canopy cover in the west by 2050
- Green space to be increased by 25% by 2030.

Benefits to the utility, and to climate-related outcomes

This regional collaborative model helps communities have a say in planning decisions around water, is replicable in other regions, and has the added benefit of generating public and importantly, political interest, which increases the chances of future funding.

There is significant inequity in access to high quality greenspace and canopy cover in Melbourne’s western suburbs. Greening the West is already having an impact on improving equity, and particularly the concept of intergenerational equity – respecting the needs of current as well as future generations.

Over five years Greening the West has leveraged over \$30m in state and federal funding to deliver better liveability and urban heat reduction outcomes in Melbourne’s west. This includes over \$6.6m funding from City West Water/Greater Western Water through the Stormwater Harvesting Partnership, which has led to the creation of nine new stormwater harvesting projects across six local government areas including at Woodlands Park (Essendon), Edinburgh Gardens (Fitzroy), Melbourne Ballpark (Altona), and Dempster Park (Sunshine). These projects have increased resilience to climate change in Melbourne’s west, and saved around 110 megalitres of potable water annually.

Overall Greening the West has achieved the following outcomes so far for the community in Melbourne's west: The Greening the West regional partnership has received two Premier's Sustainability Awards: in 2019 for the One Million Trees project, a sub-project falling under the GTW banner, and in 2020 City West Water won for their Stormwater Harvesting Partnership Fund, which has assisted in achieving Greening the West's desired outcomes through provision for alternative water for urban greening and cooling. In 2020 GTW was also recognised by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for the One Million Trees project in delivering Goal 13- Taking Climate Action.

Greening the West has significantly raised the profile of the water utility and its current and potential roles in supporting community health through urban greening and cooling. It provides a model that can be replicated in other regions, regardless of jurisdictional circumstances. This program has demonstrated how collaboration benefits the water utility, and has led to commitments to other partnerships, such as Living Melbourne, Moonee Ponds Creek Chain of Ponds, Hobsons Bay Wetland Centre and recently an MOU with Victoria University.

