



Game-changers

ATM environmental columnist Kate Torgersen looks back on the recent Sports Environment Alliance Summit in Melbourne.

The Sports Environment Alliance (SEA)... hands up if you have heard of it? If not, may I suggest looking into this not-for-profit organisation and seeing how you can get involved in making sure there is a future for all to continue playing sport. The SEA hosted their third sustainability summit at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on 5 March and being a previous panellist in 2017 I was eager to return and hear from all the presenters.

The summit focusses on practical ways the sports industry can limit its impact on the environment. The event brought together national, state, community and professional sporting associations along with all levels of sport and government, facility managers and sustainable service providers to explore what a sustainable future may look like for the sporting sector.

As Dr Sheila Nguyen, executive director of SEA, explains: "The sport industry needs the environment and right now the environment needs a loud, sexy, high profile voice and I believe sport holds the megaphone." Dr Nguyen will be presenting at the 2019 Asia Pacific Turfgrass Conference in Brisbane on reducing environmental impacts at sporting venues and I can guarantee you will leave the

presentation feeling empowered to create a sustainable future at your workplace.

FACILITY TOURS

This year's summit kicked off with three facility tours of the MCG, Flemington racecourse and the Melbourne and Olympic Parks Trust precinct. The MCG tour took delegates 'back of house', going behind the scenes of the iconic arena to get an insight into the eco-efforts being made. The Melbourne Cricket Club is a proud foundation member of the SEA and was recognised with the inaugural #SEACHanger Award at the 2016 summit.

In 2018 the MCG became the first sporting venue to close the loop on organics recycling, with waste produced at the stadium treated in-house via an organics dehydrator. This waste is turned into a soil additive that is then used on the stadium surrounds.

At Flemington, home of the Victoria Racing Club (VRC), executive general manager James Reid, explained the facility's sustainability innovations which went into the design of the new state-of-the-art Club Stand.

Due to pressures from the public, the VRC took this on board and knew it was time to start implementing new sustainable practices, with some of the initiatives including;



- Installing solar panels on the grandstand rooftop and superscreen (this generates more than 25,000KW/h of power each year);
- Working closely with waste contractors to increase recycling to in excess of 90 per cent;
- Openly communicating with their members and patrons through race books, signage and newsletters to encourage their support of sustainability initiatives when utilising their facilities;
- Redistributing surplus food through SecondBite to people in need. After one Melbourne Cup Carnival alone, 3670 kilograms of fresh food was redistributed, providing more than 7000 meals to people in need.

Each year the VRC aims to reach peak potential with their sustainability outcomes, even to the point where they offer funding incentives for sponsors and corporates to reduce MDF in their builds, encouraging them to use recyclable materials.

MOPT TOUR

This year I participated in the Melbourne and Olympic Parks Trust (MOPT) tour which visited Margaret Court and Rod Laver arenas to gain an insight into their sustainability initiatives. During the tour we learned about the design features that contributed to Margaret Court Arena becoming Australia's first Leadership

The new Club Stand at Flemington incorporated a number of design and operation elements to improve the VRC's sustainability efforts

in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold certified stadium.

Central to this is the water management system which has a storage capacity of about 6.2 million litres, made up of the following;

- 4.5 million litre raw water storage tank located under Rod Laver Arena;
- 550,000 litre clear water storage tanks located at the northern end of Melbourne Arena;
- 911,000 litre clear water storage tanks located at the treatment plant room at the southern end of Rod Laver Arena;
- 200,000 litre underground catchment tank and pump wells located at the Bateman Ave berm.

Some eight million litres of this water is used for toilet flushing in the Rod Laver Arena, Margaret Court Arena and the Tennis HQ building in the past year, with the remainder used for irrigation.

MOPT horticulture manager Adrian Black spoke about the success of the system: "The water harvesting system at Melbourne Park produced a phenomenal 42 million litres over the last 12 months. We harness this to operate Melbourne and Olympic Parks' irrigation network covering approximately 20 hectares, ensuring the various areas are maintained in excellent condition for all their widespread uses. This includes the training and playing grounds for an array of professional sporting clubs and codes, along with community recreation and public spaces that welcome the Victorian public to enjoy the precinct in the heart of Melbourne city."

Adrian also mentioned that studies were currently being conducted to see if more water could be harvested from other areas of the precinct, as there is always an increasing numbers of events; the more water that can be harvested the better!

AGCSA CEO Mark Unwin attended the summit and says it was great to see the work being achieved across the sports industry in the area of sustainability: "As the issues from drought conditions across Australia continue to place further pressures on already challenged turf managers, its events like the SEA Summit that reinforce the conservation and environmental stewardship approach. While there is always more work to do, it is pleasing



MOPT horticulture manager Adrian Black

The MCG hosted the third annual Sports Environment Alliance Summit in early March

to see that many golf course superintendents and sports turf managers already have a focus in this area and, in many regards, are leading the way with their thinking around water management and minimising environmental impacts at their venues."

DOING YOUR BIT

As Mark mentions there are a number of sports turf managers out there already heading down the right path in creating a sustainable future within their workplace. With current weather patterns changing and the impact of climate change upon us, not to mention increased pressures from committees/members and challenging budgets, if you have not already done so then now is the opportune time to start taking action at your facility.

You can start by implementing the smallest of changes at your workplace and below are five actions you can do to kick-start the process;

- Ensure all lights and computers that are not needed overnight are completely shut down;
- Change light fittings to more efficient lighting (e.g.: LEDs)
- Regularly perform irrigation audits to check sprinkler heads are operating correctly and irrigating only what is needed;
- Reduce amounts of mown rough to native areas;
- Ensure rubbish collected from on course is sorted into recyclables and land fill.

Often a good idea is to delegate a staff member or a club member volunteer to be responsible for implementing these actions, researching more sustainable options and educating members and visitors. These days there is so much information readily available and there are certifications available to clubs, funding opportunities and organisations out there willing to assist. Any step you take is going to show the community and your members that you are committed to a sustainable future.

One quote that really stuck with me from the summit came from the VRC's James Reid when he answered a question about 'where to do you start'... "Just start! If you are doing the right thing then generally it works out!" Whatever direction you choose, heading towards a more sustainable future will be a positive selling point for your club." 🙌

