School Environmental Management Plan

1st DRAFT, September 2015

Written by: Staff & Parents of SHHS
Introduction
Welcome! You have actually opened this document and decided to see what it’s all about, which is great because frankly, we need you!

‘Ah but...’ you say, ‘I’m just browsing, I can’t really help because I’m too (insert excuse clause here – busy, inexperienced, tired, young, old, like-whatever)’

Ah but...’ we say, ‘you are a citizen of this planet and thus have a vested interest, so in fact you are fully qualified! Again, Welcome :-)'

‘Fine’, you say, ‘so, what’s a SEMP anyway?

‘Glad you asked, because a SEMP (or School Environmental Management Plan for short) is the key to transforming a school’s eco-cred.

Now, just so you know, at this stage we are not up to a fully-fledged SEMP – this draft version has only just cracked its shell and we haven’t even looked over the edge of the nest yet let alone taken wing.’

‘Oh, so this is still the beginning?’ you say

‘Yep,’ say we.

This draft SEMP is a starting point to spark discussion and get as many keen beans as possible onto the development of a final SEMP.

Now as for the final SEMP, well look out! That thing will be a doozy! It will look slick with flash editing, it will have had heaps of bright ideas incorporated into its very DNA and it will guide the school’s staff, students, P&C and wider school community into an enviable place of ecological symbiosis.

Well, if not, it will at least help us get somewhere between here and there.

This is a key moment in the school’s history. The winds have changed and the opportunities are there, ripe for the picking - now is the time! So read on, (but maybe skip straight to the ‘Actions’ section) check out the ideas, add some new ones, have a rant about the ones you don’t like, its all good. Just get involved! If two heads are better than one, just imagine what the combined crania (yes that’s the plural – we checked) of SHHS can achieve...?
School Vision/Mission statement
In our caring school community, students are supported in their love of learning and guided in their development to become positive, contributing, globally minded citizens.

Eco Vision Statement
Students and teachers of Smith's Hill High School will work collaboratively with the wider school community to exemplify knowledge of and practices in environmental sustainability.

Management and planning priorities
(These will be determined as a result of feedback from the draft SEMP. Stay tuned!)

School profile and background
Smith's Hill High School is a co-educational selective high school situated in central Wollongong. The school seeks to promote excellence in a spirit of trust and cooperation through providing a challenging broad-based curriculum in a positive, safe and rewarding environment.

Our close proximity to the beach, Wollongong CBD, the University of Wollongong (Main & Innovation Campuses), the Illawarra Institute of Technology, Illawarra Performing Arts Centre and Beaton Park sporting complex allows us to provide a balanced curriculum in terms of academic pursuits, cultural and sporting experiences. The curriculum is supplemented by relevant excursions and extra-curricular activities, which include camps and national competitions of an academic nature. Students are expected to participate in sport and are encouraged to pursue their strengths in all fields of endeavour.

Students who choose to attend the school do so from an area that stretches from the southern suburbs of Sydney to Bateman's Bay in the south. All students are encouraged to become independent learners, make choices concerning their own learning paths and to extend themselves through involvement in extra-curricular activities.

About the local environment and community
Wollongong is a seaside city located in the Illawarra region of New South Wales, Australia. Wollongong is perched on the narrow coastal strip between the Illawarra Escarpment and the Pacific Ocean, 82 kilometers south of Sydney. Geologically, the city is located in the southeastern part of the Sydney basin, which extends from Newcastle to Nowra.

The Wollongong metropolitan area extends from Helensburgh in the north to Shellharbour in the South. The Wollongong Statistical District has a population of just over 290,000, making Wollongong the third largest city in New South Wales after Sydney and Newcastle, and the ninth largest city in Australia. This District covers the local government areas of Wollongong, Shellharbour and Kiama, extending from the town of Helensburgh in the north to Gerroa in the south.

Wollongong is noted for its heavy industry, its port activity and the quality of its physical setting, occupying a narrow coastal plain between an almost continuous chain of surf beaches and the cliff line of the magnificent rainforest-covered Illawarra escarpment.

Environmental education achievements
SHHS has a long history of environmental initiatives.

- Working bees have been conducted at the school for decades with parents and teachers volunteering their time to help maintain the school grounds, which were actually award winning gardens earlier in the school’s history.
- In 1999 the School Environment Team (SET) was established. The teachers and students involved in this group originally worked on transforming areas of the school grounds, planting native species,
installing a bush tucker and rainforest trail, conducting energy & water audits and other initiatives. These were supported with grant funding secured though the Illawarra Environmental Education Centre. The SET is still in operation (details provided in the following section).

- Installation of water tanks (needs quantification of date introduced, number, volumes & use).
- Installation of Solar Panels (quantification needed of date introduced, wattage and tariffs).
- Introduction of Environmental Science elective for years 8 – 10.
- Implementation of classroom based paper-recycling system by SRC in 2010.
- Participation in the Climate Clever Energy Savers programme 2012 with energy audits conducted and grant funding received for a partial lighting retrofit.

**School Environment Team (SET)**

Current SET operates with participation from students, teachers, parents and support from SRC & P&C. This organisation has undergone numerous iterations since commencing in 1999 and has been driven by various staff and parents with students helping decide on projects and assist in their implementation.

Recently this group has added a “wing” group, SEAL (School Environmental Action League) and there is fresh interest in helping improve the school’s environmental management from all levels of the school community. This group is made up of interested students.

**Actions**

In determining priorities, the overall goal of this school’s environmental transformation should be the focus. As a school, it would seem the most important outcomes are educational, however in terms of environmental management, the impacts of initiatives are not always clear and success cannot always be measured immediately. For instance, a school may wish to have a vegetable garden. This may have a negligible environmental impact in the short term when compared to improving the school’s energy efficiency, however it would generate awareness and perhaps a passion for gardening in many individuals which may manifest years later through these ex-students creating their own gardens, reducing food waste, reducing food miles, incorporating healthy eating habits into their diet and other spin-offs, thus having a larger long term impact.

Is it more important to just focus on improving the school’s environmental management or fostering a long-term interest in environmental stewardship? Arguments can be made either way.

There are a multitude of opportunities for improvement in the environmental performance of SHHS. A survey of students, staff and parents produced the following list, which is not yet prioritised. It has been suggested that the best way forward would be to see which of the ideas suggested garner the most support and then establish these as the first initiatives to address. It is also noted that if efforts are concentrated on a small number of initiatives at a time, more success will be achieved, which will bolster confidence and in turn lead to further successes in other areas.

It also goes without saying that all of these initiatives have potential curriculum links and tie in with project based learning strategies – a recognised technique for creating life long learning skills.

**Curriculum Integration**

To achieve more than just improvement in the management of the school’s environment, the strategies being implemented should be incorporated into the school curriculum. Many resources exist to help with this process (eg: The DET’s booklet ‘Implementing the Environmental Education Policy in your school’ 2001). Using the environment as a focus for project based learning is a relevant, exciting and motivational experience for students and can be integrated into almost any faculty’s syllabus. This will also provide the opportunity for cross-faculty collaboration and whole-of-school cooperation towards a common goal.

Many teachers at SHHS are already delivering excellent environmental education lessons and utilising the school grounds, buildings, resource management or other aspects of sustainability in the local area. It would be extremely valuable to develop a register of these and link them into any SEMP that is developed.

Environmental issues now form a significant part of the mainstream media’s content and these issues are likely to engage students as they pertain to their future. If there is uncertainty about appropriate actions, this
can form a great basis for debate, research, creativity, experimentation, construction, documentation, and problem solving.

To further integrate environmental education into the curriculum, teachers will need support through professional development. This could occur through them attending appropriate courses on MyPL, visiting other schools that are already integrating environmental education, dedicating RFF time to planning, dedicating staff meeting time to workshop/planning, hiring a consultant to work with teachers across a range of faculties to develop appropriate programs or other means.

Integrating the SEMP will take time and despite potential resistance from some staff, the outcomes will speak for themselves.

**Grounds Management**

**Vegetable & herb permaculture garden** set up to help supply TAS and supplement the canteen. This initiative would require input from a variety of faculties and could be maintained by staff, students and parent/community volunteers. Clan groups could also be incorporated into the garden’s management. The most appropriate location for a significant vegetable garden would be the grass area between F block, H block and the main quad. If this were to be created in a permaculture style, there could also be the inclusion of appropriate fruit trees and soil building crops. For this to be an effective resource for the school, curriculum links would need to be developed, as has been the case at a number of other local high schools – Warrawong High School in particular.

**New Opportunities**
- Biodiversity gardens and habitat areas created for fauna such as lizards, frogs, bats, insects, native stingless bees etc.
- Bush Tucker & bush medicine trail with documentation and/or electronic guidebook.

**Water Management**

A water audit was recently conducted (2014) and the findings of this process should be examined for recommendations to improve water management at SHHS. It has been noted that there are some water tanks in the school but how well they are being utilised is not well understood. Feedback from students indicates that many taps in school toilets are left running and it is quite common for schools to have leaking toilets, taps or even leaking pipes underground. Results of the water audit should shed light on the current situation.

**Waste Management**

- Once again a waste audit should be the starting point to quantify waste streams and identify potential areas for improvement.

**New Opportunities**
- Recycling system for more than just paper, ie – glass, milk containers, plastic bottles. Note: it is less expensive for recyclables to be collected by a waste contractor than it is to service a general waste bin.
- Composting.
- Changing default margins on printing from 2.5cm to 1.5cm to reduce wasted paper.
- Revise BYOD policy and help head towards more paperless lessons.

**Energy Management**

An energy audit should be conducted to analyse the schools energy consumption and potential areas of improvement. Some existing areas for improvement already identified are:
- Installation of energy efficient light bulbs to reduce energy consumption throughout the school - both internal and external lighting. Some key problem areas include the school's library, which
essentially have over 100 incandescent light bulbs running for approximately 6 days a week, for 7 hours per day.

• Insulation of B block.

New Opportunities
• Make the whole school carbon positive! This could be achieved with a large-scale solar system feeding into the grid.
• More solar panels
• SOS “Switch Off Something” program
• Timer for lights
• Have an electronic clear-out

Conclusion
This initial collection of ideas is designed to spark conversations and create a base from which an effective and practical SEMP can be developed, with realistic goals and timelines. The journey ahead is exciting and full of opportunity. There is interest from all levels of the school community and support being offered from a range of professionals who have the future of their children and benefit of the school at heart. Of course there will be naysayers, there always are at times of change. It is also the nature of schools that supporters and practitioners will change over time – students graduate and parents leave, teachers too come and go, but the learning achieved through investigating and implementing environmental transformation at SHHS will always be with those who were involved.