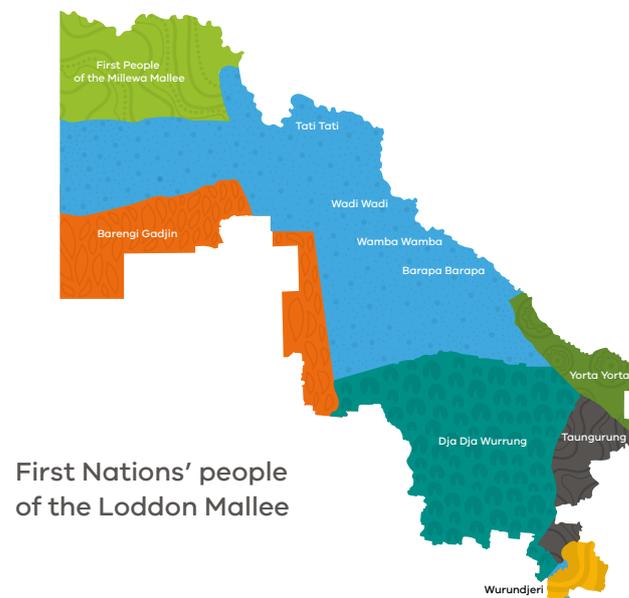


Regional climate leadership in action



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it. We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.



Thank you

We would like to thank our collaborators and guest presenters for your wise and generous contributions to the program. We would also like to thank the Regional Climate Leaders for your passion and commitment to a just climate transition in our region.

The scale of action needed to adapt to a changing climate is beyond the responsibility of any single resident, group or organisation. It is through your leadership in communities that we will learn and adapt together.

The Regional Climate Leadership program was supported by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (now the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action) and funded through the Sustainability Fund – Supporting Our Regions to Adapt program.

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Why a regional climate leadership program?

ADAPT Loddon Mallee is working towards transformational climate justice and strengthen community resilience. We are doing this with communities by building climate knowledge, grassroots leadership, and place-based adaption action.

In response to the growing body of evidence that supports place-based and community led approaches to climate adaptation, ADAPT Loddon Mallee saw an opportunity to pilot a new type of leadership program that would see the Victorian Government learning with communities across the region.

The initiative would support a group of emerging community leaders to strengthen their skills, knowledge and confidence to lead climate adaptation action in their communities.

By supporting community leaders to drive local action, climate adaption would more effectively address local needs, reflect community values and promote a sense of ownership.

Working in place would build a network of leaders across the region to support and learn from each other. A regional network would also help to inform how the Victorian Government could best support adaption responses in Loddon Mallee.

Why this report?

ADAPT is committed to taking a learn-by-doing approach. This report reflects the valuable learning, insights and recommendations captured from participants and the project team through the delivery of the pilot project.

Method

We gathered feedback from climate leaders, the ADAPT project team and LEAD Loddon Murray using the following data collection methods.



9

semi-structured interviews



6

participant interviews

2

with the ADAPT project team

1

with LEAD Loddon Murray team

22

responses to our mid-point survey

11

responses to our end program survey

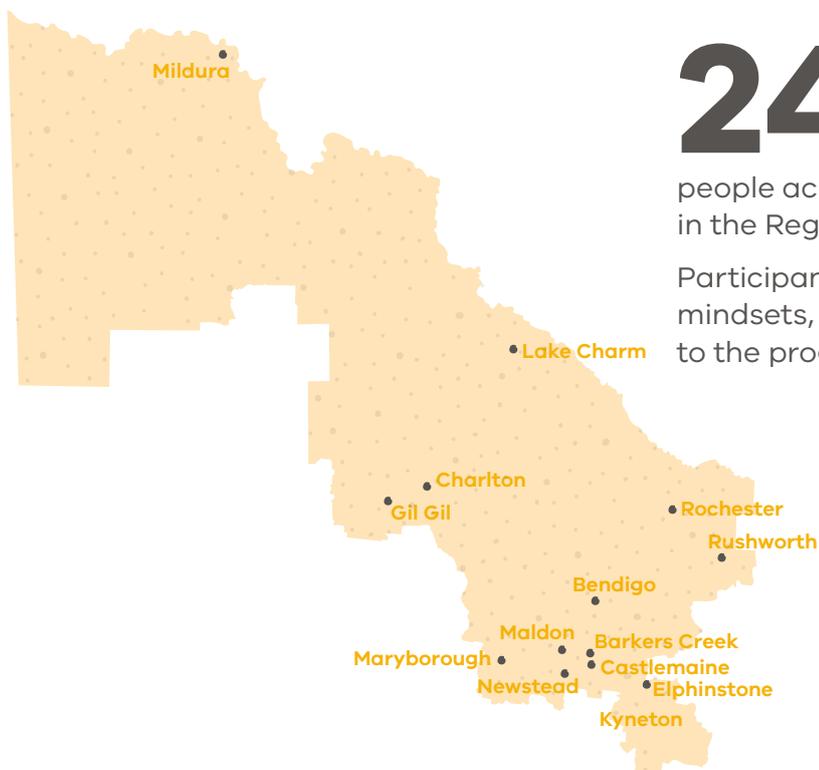


What is the Regional Climate Leadership program?

The Regional Climate Leadership program was a pilot delivered in collaboration with LEAD Loddon Murray. It brought together a diverse group of emerging community leaders with the Victorian Government where knowledge about local climate risks, adaptation and lived experiences were shared. The program was also a space to test ideas through hands-on projects and connect with others.

The program delivered group learning activities, local adaptation project showcases, evenings with subject matter experts, a book club, and mentoring and networking sessions.

The people



24

people across the Loddon Mallee participated in the Regional Climate Leadership program.

Participants brought a range of different mindsets, backgrounds, and life experiences to the program.

For more information on the RCL graduates visit the [ADAPT Loddon Mallee website](#).

The journey

2019



LEAD Loddon Mallee engaged to design and deliver a Regional Climate Leadership Program for Loddon Mallee. The program centred around a four month program including four weekend residential sessions and a community project.



24 participants from across Loddon Mallee recruited to the program.

2020



First weekend residential held in Swan Hill.



COVID-19 pandemic impacts reach Australia, restrictions begin rolling out in Victoria.



Programs transition to online delivery, shifts focus to participant wellbeing and supporting communities through challenging times.



Mid-point program review conducted with participants. Highlighted need for program to adapt to ongoing COVID restrictions and increasing pressures on participants and their communities.



ADAPT Loddon Mallee in partnership with LEAD Loddon Murray redesigned the program:

- online with shorter, more regular sessions
- pre-recorded materials (allow participants to work at own pace)
- introduction of a book club
- change of focus from project delivery to learning, knowledge sharing and network building.



The program



Four people were successfully recruited in round two.

2020-21



Participants engaged with the new online program including:

- hearing from subject matter experts
- local adaptation case studies
- group learning and networking activities
- mentoring sessions
- book club.



Program graduation in Bendigo was held, in real life! Participants were able to connect and share their learnings.





Insights

The following section shares insights about the quality of program delivery and outcomes achieved for participants, communities and government.

Program delivery

Overall feedback from participants on the delivery of the program was overwhelmingly positive. Key factors in the successful delivery include:

Good communication and support

Clear and regular communication from the ADAPT team help participants understand what to expect week to week. The flexibility of the program made participants feel supported to participate in a way that worked for them.

100%

of survey respondents said they were:

happy with the level of communication and responsiveness to feedback from the ADAPT team

supported to participate in the program in a way that worked for them

Adaptive program design

The uncertainty around the unfolding global pandemic meant the program needed to continuously adapt to accommodate changing COVID-19 settings and pressures on participants and their communities.

Program adaptations included:

- Shift to online delivery and adapting sessions to shorter regular modules delivered over a longer period.
- Creation and curation of program content that participants can work through at own pace including video modules, session recordings and a monthly book club.
- Change of focus from project delivery to knowledge sharing and project design.

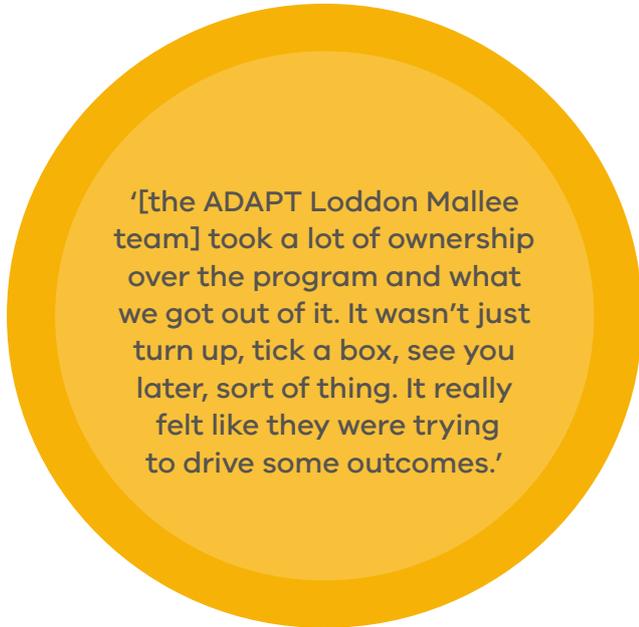


'The program was an example of adaptation in action – we were all adapting to a whole new world during COVID'.

'[the program team] pulled in some really critical and valuable information and examples that were able to be delivered online in an engaging way.'

Commitment of project team

Participants highlighted the commitment from the ADAPT Loddon Mallee team as a key factor in the program's success. The enthusiasm, commitment and hard work demonstrated by the team was a key motivator for participant engagement.



'[the ADAPT Loddon Mallee team] took a lot of ownership over the program and what we got out of it. It wasn't just turn up, tick a box, see you later, sort of thing. It really felt like they were trying to drive some outcomes.'

Outcomes for participants

The program aimed to strengthen the knowledge, skills and confidence of participants to lead climate adaption action in their communities and create a network of climate leaders across the region. Participants shared their insights about the changes and outcomes they experienced as a result of the program.

100%

Respondents to the program evaluation survey said that:

.....

the program helped to reflect on and strengthen leadership.

.....

the program improved their knowledge around climate risks and adaptation.

.....

they built connections and learned from their peers in the program.

.....

the program increased participant's confidence and motivation to take climate adaptation action in their community.

.....

90%

Respondents to the program evaluation survey said that:

.....

the program helped to strengthen their community engagement practice.

.....

the program increased skills and knowledge in designing and implementing local climate adaptation projects.

.....

Inspiration and motivation

Several participants shared that they had been feeling overwhelmed because of the enormity of the climate crisis which, in turn, had led to disengagement. They felt that the scale of the problem was too big to tackle at an individual level.

The program's local focus was an opportunity to share real action that local communities are already taking. These stories provided the inspiration and motivation that helped participants shift their mindset from being overwhelmed to ready to take action.

'Climate change is such a huge topic...didn't know how to tackle it. The program gave me the tools...look at things at a more micro level. Seeing how small community organisations get started at a real grassroots level and have real impact.'

'Psychologically, it helped me kind of break that barrier of trying to fix the entire world and just focus on what can be done in my local community.'

Strengthened knowledge

Participants gained valuable knowledge through the program, the modules on climate science, project management and community engagement were especially valued by them.

ADAPT's learn-by-doing approach also encouraged participants to apply their learnings, test their ideas and find new ways of adapting in a safe-to-fail environment.

Focusing the program on local climate data and examples of adaptation in action supported the participants to ground their learning in their community.

'The material...much stronger awareness and body of knowledge to be able to speak with more clarity and more user-friendly way about what climate change and resilience means... when I went out to talk to people about my project, I could speak in a way that people didn't want to walk away'

I took my original idea and it totally transformed due to COVID, I've ended somewhere I never imagined – my project is now going to reach hundreds more people in an interesting and engaging way.

Increased confidence

The program supported participants to identify their strengths and how they could contribute to building climate resilience in their communities. Several participants specifically mentioned the support they felt from the ADAPT team as a key factor in increasing their confidence to take action in their communities.

'I really do have to thank this program for giving me a kind of leg up and support to get going... the confidence came from knowing the program coordinators had my back.'

'[the program] emboldened me to do hands-on work with community that I have never attempted before'

Connection with the ADAPT team

Participants developed strong connections with the ADAPT team. These relationships have allowed participants to:

- access timely and locally relevant information
- access project funding
- gain credibility and trust in their community
- have a direct channel to share their knowledge, experiences, and concerns with the Victorian Government.

'The valuable things included the relationship with the ADAPT team, through this we were able to access funding for the Sunraysia Local Food Alliance. We now have a solid project in our community that wouldn't have happened if I didn't participate in the program.'

Network building

The first two-day workshop and the graduation were held in person, these were important opportunities for participants to connect with each other. The impacts of COVID-19 on participants and the move to online delivery did limit the opportunities for peer connection throughout the program.

Despite these challenges, long-lasting connections were made and have led to impactful collaborative projects. Some examples are shared on pages 14–16 of this report.

'I really enjoyed meeting like-minded people who you know were 10 minutes, 15 minutes down the road and we're all doing great things in community and engaged in different ways'

'[Connections were] strong for those who had met in-person first, but [the experience] was the best it could be in an online environment'



Outcomes for communities

Outcomes from the program were not limited to those who participated in the program, they also rippled into communities across the region. A number of climate leaders applied their diverse skills, knowledge and passions to deliver climate adaptation projects for their communities.

Here is a snapshot of some of the innovative projects implemented by the climate leaders.

Climate Resilience is... an Art Exhibition

Michelle Mcgoldrick wanted to bring together her love of the arts with her passion for action on climate. Using art as a communication tool to spark climate conversations and action, Michelle invited artists from across Loddon Mallee to create pieces that reflect on what climate resilience means to them.

Climate Resilience is...an Art Exhibition was a collection of 19 artworks exhibited four times and featured as part of the Conflux Arts Festival in Bendigo. Done in collaboration with audio documentary maker Kyla Brettle, the artworks and artist statements were turned into a standalone audio-visual artwork.



Mel Sky 'Home'



Akhila Fernando 'Think'

Bushfire Ready Resource for Young People

Jemille McKenzie drew on her personal experience escaping the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires to create bushfire preparedness resources specifically tailored to young people and people with a disability. It features clear, concise information in easy-to-access fridge magnets.



Climate Ready Radio

Geoff Murray in collaboration with Kyla Brettle is leading a community radio project that showcases inspiring stories of grassroots climate adaptation to spark conversation and action in communities across Loddon Mallee

Elphinstone Cool Places

Samantha Downing was concerned about the impacts of increased temperatures and fire risk in her hometown of Elphinstone. In collaboration with her community Sam has drawn on her experience in landscape architecture to begin regenerating the local landscape.

Her projects have included working closely with First Nations' people and Elphinstone Primary to plant a bushfood garden on a neglected part of the school grounds and regenerating the surrounds of a local creek where people and wildlife can escape from the heat.



Endgame Podcast

Kyla Brettle applied her skills and experience as a documentarian to create the Endgame podcast, a creative non-fiction audio project exploring climate change adaptation within the Loddon Mallee region.

Endgame comprises a series of eight soundworks, set alongside photographs, blog-style articles and links.



Kids Climate Change Activity Book

Raelene Gooch saw an opportunity to add value to the ADAPT Kids Activity Book, a local climate change resource for primary school aged kids. Drawing on her teaching experience, she wanted to understand how the book was being used in schools and what support teachers might need.

Raelene undertook an evaluation of the Activity Book which showed that teachers wanted more guidance on linking the book to the Victorian Curriculum. In response, Raelene developed a lesson planner and teacher resource to accompany the Activity Book.



Long Live Tarrangower

Melanie Scaife wanted to encourage conversations about climate change in her community of Maldon. Mel drew on her experience as a writer and editor to write a regular column for the local newspaper the Tarrangower Times. The column focuses on what the community holds dear and how they can be protected into the future with the aim of shifting community concern to action.



Image courtesy of Carmen Bunting

Making change through local council

Lisbeth Long joined the program to learn about climate change to strengthen the resilience of her family's farm and find effective ways to talk to other farmers about this often taboo topic. After completing the program Lisbeth decided to run for local council on a climate change platform and was elected to council in 2020.





Rochester Community Garden

Rochester Community House Coordinator Amanda Logie partnered with the Rotary Club to establish the Rochester Community Garden. The garden established a working group made up of like-minded local community members with a common goal of providing a sustainable, adaptive food garden that can educate and assist the whole community to become more independent and climate resilient.



Rushworth Community Garden

Lou Costa brought together a group of keen gardeners in Rushworth who were concerned about the impacts of extreme weather on local wildlife and their community. The groups started by revitalising what was a weed-infested site on the edge of town into indigenous wildflower beds. The regular working bees brought the community together and built a sense of shared purpose and new initiatives emerged such as food swaps and a seed-bank.



School Leaders' Program

Troy Butler established the Sustainability Leadership Group at Maryborough Education Centre (MEC). The group enables students with an interest in the environment and climate a change to have a say on the school's sustainability policies and nurture the confidence and knowledge they'll need in the face of a changing climate



Sunraysia Local Food Movement

Rachel Kendrigan is passionate about strong rural and regional communities. Rachel facilitated a series of local food gatherings that brought together farmers, growers, distributors, eaters and community workers for rigorous and inclusive conversations about what can be done together to improve the local food system. This movement has birthed numerous projects and collaborations in the Mallee.





School leaders' program

Outcomes for government

The ADAPT team's close involvement in the design and delivery of the program helped to also achieve outcomes for the Victorian Government.

Enabling place-based and community led climate adaptation

The program was designed to serve dual purposes. Firstly, to strengthen the adaptive leadership capacity across Loddon Mallee while also establishing a network of community members with diverse lived experiences to be part of the co-design of the Loddon Mallee Climate Ready Plan.

The program offered a space for the Victorian Government and community learn about the local risks and impacts of climate change and test new ideas together through a learn-by-doing approach. This foundation enabled the development of a regional climate adaptation strategy that:

- is deeply grounded in place
- leverages the diverse knowledge and skills of individuals, communities, and government
- communities feel a sense of pride and ownership of.



'The amount of community input into the plan was exceptional... to engage and get that much feedback across such a diverse sample of the community was incredible.'

Improved community trust in government

The commitment to outcomes and the centring of community through the design and delivery of the program helped to strengthen community trust in government. Climate leaders highlighted the importance of government being based and invested in place, they are both public servants and members of the community. Improved levels of trust have enabled greater two-way communication channels between communities and government which will better inform policy development and service delivery to the region.



'...helped...smaller regional areas where there isn't a great level of trust in government...want to speak to someone they know, trust and can have a frank conversation with. Building a network of leaders across the region helped build a line of communication into these communities.'

Community activation

The complexity and far-reaching impacts of climate change call for everyone to be included in finding solutions. The program has activated a network of climate leaders who are bringing their diverse skills and passions to lead climate action in their communities and across the region. Government cannot do this alone and needs to continue to invest in supporting local leadership.

Learning

This pilot was a rich opportunity to learn about what it takes to strengthen regional climate leadership. Below are our key learnings.

Demand

There is a strong demand in Loddon Mallee for this type of leadership program. People want to lead climate adaptation in their communities, but they need support through capacity strengthening and resourcing.

Local

Grounding the program in the local context made action feel tangible and achievable.

Leadership

Climate leadership is different to traditional approaches to leadership in that:

- Climate change is a complex issue with conflicting information circulating in communities. Climate leaders need to be able to frame conversations in a way that is generative, allows different perspectives to be heard and identifies shared values.
- Climate leaders need to be empathetic to the diverse experiences and concerns of communities.
- Climate leaders are expected to be well informed about local climate impacts and able to direct people to reliable sources of information.

Self-directed learning

There is an opportunity to tailor the program to the specific needs and interests of participants and support more self-directed learning.

Resourcing

The design and delivery of a quality leadership program is resource intensive and needs to be appropriately resourced.

Delivery of content

The pivot to online delivery during COVID-19 was an effective alternative and much was learned about the efficiencies and accessibility of online content. However, all participants highlighted that connections and network building would be enhanced with the inclusion of in person sessions.



Recommendations

Continue to deliver

Continue to strengthen local climate leadership within communities through the continued delivery of the Regional Climate Leadership program in Loddon Mallee.

Share learning

Consider how this model could contribute to other regional priorities such as energy transition or disaster preparedness and recovery.

Traditional Owners

Work with Traditional Owners to develop more learning content on Traditional Owner perspectives on climate change and adaptation.

Delivery

Apply the learning gained from the online program delivery during COVID in a new hybrid program model. This would include some online modules that allow participants to work at their own pace as well as a series of in-person sessions that prioritise connection and network building.

Place-based teams

Incorporate place-based project teams to enhance opportunities for collaboration and peer learning.

Project based work

Incorporate more applied learning opportunities through project based work and field trips.

Student centred focus

Consider how the program model could be more student centred by catering to individual needs and interests of participants.



