

District 9685 Conference

Breakout session.

Rotary and sustainability – an interactive discussion.

Report on the session.

Facilitators: Richard Whiley and Patrick Longfield

Attendance: Approximately 55.

Aim of the session.

To explore options and possibilities for Rotary Clubs in District 9685 to adopt actions and activities associated with sustainability hence reducing their ecological footprint.

Discussion – general comments.

The meeting began with the topic being introduced to those present. Immediate comments covered some of the overall environmental situation seen in our world.

It became clear conflicting messages about the environment and sustainability given by governments, scientists and business added to the complexity of the overall issues. People were having considerable difficulty making informed decisions when confronted by a shortage of identifiably reliable information. While the concern was mainly about the environment directly, it did not stop there. Criticism was also levelled at retailers where labelling was difficult to interpret, contrived and often fudged.

The idea of low-hanging fruit was raised. It is most important that when a club adopts an activity it is achievable. Failure to succeed tends to smother initiative.

Points raised and/or agreed to by participants.

- Some aspects raised were beyond the capability of clubs to have a significant impact.
 - e.g. Coal-seam gas and fracking, and energy generally.
- “I do not wish to buy milk from China.” Problems of globalisation of economy.
- Perhaps clubs could have one vegetarian meal a month.
- Approach Rotaract to become involved, as the young are critical, and could be leaders in this conversation.
- The issue of what other clubs were doing in this area was raised and could provide considerable guidance. Suggest undertaking research across Rotary activities throughout the world looking for ideas.
- While there are two areas we can work: i) the club level, ii) the international level, we must focus first on club level actions and activities
- If fruit and vegetables are out of season here, then it is imported: ‘Why?’ “We are a big country, with a variety of climates - many fruits and greens are in season most of the year somewhere in Australia”.

Actions available for immediate adoption (“low hanging fruit”).

- Buy Australian made products..
- Attend farmer’s markets encouraging consumption of local produce.
- Encourage club to have one vegetarian meal a month.
- Be a participant in setting up and maybe running a Farmer’s Market.
 - negotiated with their local council. It can be a fund-raiser too, depending on the generosity of the said council.
- Clubs can encourage their venues to be “sustainable”. We could focus upon areas such as lighting, air conditioning and waste.

Concluding comments.

For the community as a whole, along with individuals, the whole area of sustainability is fraught with great difficulty, due to the very mixed messages from various sources confronting us.

There was no doubt there was general concern in the room about environmental issues. And, over-hanging all was the question: “But how can we in Rotary Clubs do anything meaningful?”

We would be delighted to assist clubs through electronic networking to make decisions. This could be enhanced by us attending club meetings either as guest speakers or to lead/engage the club in appropriate discussions.

It is worth noting that over 50% of those who have communicated with the facilitators following the session, commented that there was not enough time allocated for the tasks.