

4Pillars Sustainability Report

2018-19 Financial Year



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Statement of capacity

4Pillars is an independent, professional consulting firm, providing expert advice on environmental matters to clients from a range of business sectors. This document has been approved by a certified environmental practitioner (CEnvP), with extensive experience in environmental management, monitoring, sampling and analysis. The performance and professional integrity of CEnvPs are independently verified by the Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand (www.cenvp.org).



For further information, please visit www.4pillars.com.au.

Acknowledgement of Country

4Pillars acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which our office is located, the people of the Eora nation. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

Foreword from the Director

4Pillars provides advice to our clients to improve their environmental practices and sustainability credentials. I believe in leading by example and strive to implement this advice within our own organisation first. This is what motivated me to develop a 'sustainability plan', written in plain English, available to the public and reported on annually. Reflecting on the process so far, I have resolved to move forward with the philosophy that "imperfect action is better than perfect inaction".

Producing a sustainability report is a component of corporate accountability which has become a standard practice among large companies. A study by KPMG found that 95% of the world's largest 250 corporations issued a sustainability report in 2011; up from 45% in 2002. When I set out with my team to define and report on our goals, there was limited guidance tailored to the level of experience and resources typically available within micro businesses, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). According to the World Bank, SMEs account for 90% of all business and contribute up to 33% of GDP in emerging economies. This suggests that the collective environmental and social impacts of SMEs is significant and that all action matters. In response to this challenge (and the strong case for SMEs to increase their participation in this space) we resolved, early on, to simply make a start and take an iterative approach.

SMEs should face sustainability planning and reporting in the same way we deal with any other large, daunting task – break it down, start small and become more ambitious over time. This helps avoid being overwhelmed and set your organisation SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) goals that contribute towards a larger sustainability strategy. We hope to demonstrate through action the positive impact this approach can have and the way in which the reach and positive impact of your actions grow as the business does.

The purpose of our sustainability plan is simply to minimise the direct and indirect impacts of our business activities on the environment, to the extent possible, while managing the business in a socially and financially responsible manner. This report evaluates our level of success in achieving our sustainability objectives for the 2018-19 financial year. It also identifies challenges faced and areas for improvement to inform a discussion of our revised approach for the 2019-20 financial year.

We look forward to being part of the conversation around how startups, microbusinesses and SMEs can (and should!) integrate sustainability into their day-to-day operations

Cheers,



James Hammond

Director – 4Pillars Environmental Consulting

Energy, transport and carbon footprint

4Pillars is committed to reducing energy consumption and will engage with an accredited and reputable provider to offset greenhouse gases associated with electricity use. Accurate usage data is important to deliver on this goal and unfortunately that has proven difficult. Our office is located in a co-working space (meaning rent is fixed and inclusive of electricity and water) which has made metering impractical. Instead, we have employed an online tool to calculate a rough value. It accounts for personal devices such as laptops and monitors but not lighting, heating or any other aspects. By rounding up, we arrived at an offset amount of 1 t CO_{2e} for the 2018-19 financial year.

In this situation, it is clear to us that behavioural change by tenants can have a considerable impact. Accordingly, employees of 4Pillars attempt to reduce electricity usage in the office by only turning on devices when needed and not outside of work hours. 4Pillars will investigate options available to better measure, monitor and understand the activities contributing to our carbon footprint for the 2019-20 financial year. This will facilitate the development of a customised action plan to reduce and accurately offset emissions from electricity use.

Moving forward, 4Pillars would also ideally engage with our building owner/manager, to encourage energy efficient upgrades as well as measuring and reporting on performance. We will be looking into the energy provider for the building and suggesting a switch to a green energy provider if this is not already the case.

We realise that transport is another major contributor to emissions, representing 18% of Australia's annual greenhouse gas pollution, with cars accounting for roughly 9%. 4Pillars encourages staff to use public transport where appropriate and where it does not impact on client requirements. Use of public transport has many broad community benefits, such as reducing reliance on natural resources and the land we use for road infrastructure and car parks. It also has benefits on a personal level – for example, it is more affordable than owning a car (no parking fees, registration, insurance, petrol or service/repair costs), and increases physical activity and associated health benefits.

During the 2018-19 financial year, 4Pillars Staff carried out their work either in the 4Pillars offices or from home. Out of office activities included fieldwork, meetings with clients/regulators and conference/workshop attendance. Notably, one of our employees opted to take public transport from Wollongong to Newcastle for the purpose of attending a conference, avoiding 540 km of personal vehicle travel and associated emissions. Unfortunately, most client sites were not feasible to visit via public transport (often rural/industrial locations), and due to the impracticalities of taking equipment and/or samples on public transport, company vehicles were used for all fieldwork activities. For fieldwork where multiple staff members attended the same site(s), carpooling was undertaken, to reduce the number of vehicles used.

4Pillars uses Caltex Star Cards to manage fuel usage in company vehicles. Caltex provides a range of reporting functions, including data regarding kilometres travelled and fuel usage for each financial year. This allows us to estimate emissions related to company vehicle use, with a high degree of accuracy. For the 2018-19 year, we estimate 6.55 tonnes of CO_{2e} was generated by vehicles.

A total of 7.55 tonnes of CO_{2e} was offset for the 2018-19 year, through an accredited and reputable provider (Carbon Neutral – [Biodiverse Reforestation Carbon Offsets](#)).

Administration

According to the Department of Industry, “waste from a typical commercial office is about three-quarters paper and cardboard, 12 per cent food waste and six per cent glass and plastic. This means that almost 95 per cent of the contents are recyclable”. We view this problem as needing a multi-layered solution involving increased recycling and smarter consumption of resources.

Progress towards this can be achieved by creating a paperless office. There are also many non-environmental measurable benefits for businesses that transition from paper to digital. When employees become able to access documents anywhere and at any time, this leads to increased efficiency, productivity and cost savings. 4Pillars aims to hold all internal business documents in digital format only, including backups. We concede that this aim has not been completely realised, for example, due to the need to print forms and laboratory chain-of-custody (COC) forms for practicality and ease of completion during fieldwork. Moving forward, we may experiment with switching to tablet-based field sheets and applications (i.e. ALS Compass for COCs). Unavoidable printing is recycled via dedicated bins provided by the office building manager.

4Pillars also aims to use 100% post-consumer paper. The paper currently available at our coworking office space is sourced from FSC certified pulp, however, we will suggest switching to paper which is produced from 100 % recycled paper in the next financial year.

Client documents (including reports, proposals, and invoices) were digital by default for the 2018-19 financial year and were provided to clients either through email (secure, protected PDFs), or via private OneDrive folders. 4Pillars provided physical documents to clients on request; however, this only occurred infrequently. In most cases, this was a matter of personal preference rather than necessity. 4Pillars will continue to encourage clients to increase their acceptance of digital submissions for environmental reasons and practicality.

Non-paper waste is also an area where 4Pillars aims to improve its performance. According to industry reports, e-waste is growing at over three times the rate of household and council waste. In the 2019-20 financial year, 4Pillars will also investigate and implement responsible end-of-life recycling and disposal options for batteries and printer cartridges.

Finance

4Pillars looks beyond a simple comparison of rates and direct benefits when evaluating financial providers. All business transaction accounts were held with Bank Australia during the 2018-19 financial year, an institution that demonstrates leadership in responsible banking. According to their 2018 Corporate Report, Bank Australia allocated \$854,471 of after-tax profits to programs that benefit people and the planet.

Similarly, 4Pillars' preferred superannuation fund is Australian Ethical Super, which is Australia's only super fund dedicated to positive, competitive, ethical investment. All staff will be encouraged to select that provider and it is our nominated. At the time of writing, 75% percent of 4Pillars staff elect to invest in their future through Australian Ethical Super. They proudly join over 41,000 other Australians who watch their investments support a clean energy future and promote human rights.

Biodiversity

4Pillars has committed to donating 10% of 4Pillars' after-tax profits to the Australian Wildlife Conservancy (or an equivalent charitable organisation) to support protection of our unique plants, animals and ecosystems. 4Pillars operated in accordance with the above target for the 2018-19 financial year.

Social responsibility

We have previously acknowledged that SMEs may not have the same resources as large corporations, however, they can still make a tangible difference within their communities.

4Pillars aims to support reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. During the year, we sponsored an indigenous delegate to attend the 2018 EIANZ Annual Conference in Sydney. Furthermore, all of our reports and publications for projects that involve fieldwork include an acknowledgement of country and recognition of the traditional owners. Clients are allowed to request the removal of this section, however, no such requests have been received to date. 4Pillars will continue to investigate additional opportunities to support reconciliation during the 2019-20 financial year.

In April 2019, we partnered up with one of our clients (Aussie Industries) to participate in the 'Great Aussie Golf Day' in support of the Kids Cancer Project. The goal was to raise \$20,000 towards research for the discovery of a new treatment for neuroblastoma. We also partnered with Aussie Industries in May 2019 to help offer a warm meal to the homeless in conjunction with the Coptic Orthodox Community Outreach Service (COCOS) in Woolloomooloo.

4Pillars also aims to work with non-profit organisations on a pro bono basis whenever capacity allows. During the 2018-19 financial year, 4Pillars' Director James Hammond maintained his position as the Secretary of the NSW Division of the EIANZ Committee. His voluntary involvement in the Division included organising and managing several events throughout the year, including the division's Annual General Meeting (AGM). 4Pillars has also been working with Western Sydney University on a project to improve the availability of water quality and public health risk data for users of waterways in western Sydney – we hope to bring you more on this soon!

Performance summary

Sustainability action	Performance			Confidence			Notes and comments
	Low	Med	High	Low	Med	High	
100% of the greenhouse gases emitted due to electricity used by staff will be offset through an accredited and reputable provider							We have found it difficult to accurately gauge our share of electricity used for lighting, heating etc. in a shared office environment.
Public transport will be used where appropriate and where it does not impact on client requirements							We currently do not have a usable or practical tool for staff to nominate trips which use public transport and result in avoided emissions. We will seek to improve data quality in this area in future years.
100% of the greenhouse gases emitted due to unavoidable private vehicle transport will be offset through an accredited and reputable provider							This data is accurately reported by Caltex.
Paperless office – all internal business documents will be held in digital format only. This includes publications, records, notes etc. Backup documents will also be digital							No further comments.
Client documents and products will be digital by default. Printed documents will only be provided on client request							No further comments.
Any printed documents requested by clients will be printed on 100% post-consumer paper							This will need to be addressed in discussions with the office/building manager.
At least 75% of internal meetings will be held by tele or videoconferencing							Majority of meetings were held in person and all attendees were physically present. Teleconferencing, videoconferencing and screen sharing was used regularly, but was difficult to quantify without significant administrative burden. We intend to remove this metric in the 2019-20 year.
All business accounts will be held with Bank Australia, an institution that demonstrates leadership in responsible banking							On some occasions, Bank Australia did not offer a suitable financial product and we were required to look elsewhere to meet business needs. We intend to modify this action to state that Bank Australia will be our default financial institution, unless the business requires a specific product which is only offered elsewhere.

Sustainability action	Performance			Confidence			Notes and comments
	Low	Med	High	Low	Med	High	
4Pillars' preferred superannuation fund is Australian Ethical Super, which is Australia's only super fund dedicated to positive, competitive, ethical investment. All staff will be encouraged to select that provider							75% of staff have opted in to Australian Ethical as the company's default fund.
10% of 4Pillars' after-tax profits will be donated to the Australian Wildlife Conservancy (or an equivalent charitable organisation) to support protection of our unique plants, animals and ecosystems							This commitment was met.
Support for reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – reports and publications for projects that involve fieldwork will include an acknowledgement of country, where appropriate and agreed to by the client							This was achieved for all publications.
4Pillars will work with non-profit organisations on a pro bono basis whenever capacity allows. 4Pillars will aim to complete at least one pro bono project each year							A <i>pro bono</i> project has been commenced, in partnership with Western Sydney University; however, it is complex and could not be completed within the year. Our work on this is ongoing.

Challenges and changes to the 2019-20 action plan

We generally found our 2018-19 sustainability actions to be practical, achievable and measurable. However, following our review, we believe improvements can be made to the 2019-20 plan, by removing, modifying and adding certain actions.

In the 2019-20 plan, the following actions will be removed:

- At least 75% of internal meetings will be held by tele or videoconferencing.

In the 2019-20 plan, the following actions will be amended or added:

- 'All business accounts will be held with Bank Australia, an institution that demonstrates leadership in responsible banking' will be changed to 'All business accounts will be held with Bank Australia, unless suitable financial products are only available via another provider'.

Concluding statement

4Pillars will continue to review and improve our sustainability plan as the business grows. We will continue to strive towards our longer-term, strategic sustainability goals, including achieving ISO 14001 certification and B-Corporation status. We look forward to taking this journey with our clients and stakeholders and reporting on our progress in future years.