



Chapter 7

Promoting the Benefits of Golf Courses



Developing a high profile in the community

It is important for golf courses to develop a high profile in the community.

- Showing that sustainable management is occurring
- Explaining the social and economic benefits of golf courses
- Keeping the community, decision makers, environmental groups and the media informed
- Identifying special interest groups and meeting their specific needs.

In the community there are misconceptions about the management of golf courses. These perceptions need to be recognised and dealt with honestly. Evasiveness or dishonesty is likely to create an atmosphere of mistrust.

Environmental awareness has to begin at the highest level of management in golf clubs, commonly this will be with the board of directors. A golf club should declare an environmental policy and publicise it to the community through the members. Environmental management plans will be most successful if many groups interested in the golf course can be involved. This will include not only the management, greens staff and members, but the entire local community.

The most effective way to communicate with the community at large is through the golfers who utilise golf courses. They have a vested interest in their golf course and their education will spread the word.

Golf clubs can obtain information and resources as well as developing their environmental profile by joining local environmental groups. To find out about local environmental groups consult the Australian Conservation Foundation's directory of environment groups "Green Pages" (see Appendix 4) or the information centres in each state (Appendix 2).

Consultation with the Community can include

- health and safety of golfers, staff and community from pesticides
- hazard of flying golf balls to staff and surrounding community
- hazard to children of golf course machinery and maintenance sheds
- pollution by nutrients, pesticides and heavy metals
- ecological disturbance through vegetation clearing and the impacts of pesticides
- noise pollution from machinery
- conservation of native flora and fauna



Community Consultation Ideas

- conduct a survey of local attitudes to the course
- arrange public displays and site visits
- arrange public forums
- advertise in local media
- brief journalists and community leaders of the positive works on the course
- establish community/business/school links
- meet with special interest groups
- organise public speaking engagements with local community organisations
- direct mail the local community
- conduct members meetings
- send out club newsletters
- organise working bees
- place notices in clubhouse, pro-shop
- print information on the score card
- put up signs around the course
- participate in government co-ordinated programs such as Landcare, Total Catchment Management, Streamwatch and Waterwatch.



J. Kaapro/ATRI

Use of appropriate signage can convey important information about golf courses to the community.

Golf courses - the view of the environmentalist

To gain an appreciation of the concerns of environmental groups in regard to golf courses, a survey was sent to over 100 environmental organisations around Australia. These organisations were selected from the Australian Conservation Foundation's "Green Pages" (1996). 31 replies were received and are summarised below (groups who responded are listed in Appendix 5).

Question 1.

What are your concerns about golf courses in Australia?

Three issues of golf course management were highlighted by over 50% of the responses;

- Water pollution by nutrients and pesticide residues
- Destruction of native vegetation
- Excessive water use

Blackwood Golf Club, SA

Blackwood Golf Club is located 10 km south of the city of Adelaide, SA. The club has a monthly newsletter which is sent out to members. One of the members, Jack Peak, is an avid bird watcher and has his own column in the newsletter to profile bird species frequenting the course. The club has found this to be an excellent way to educate members on the environmental aspects of the course. The newsletter of July 1996 included a drawing and short article about the Plover (Venellus miles).

"many members have been watching the plover sitting on the eggs on the island in the middle of the pond. At the same time the plover has been watching the rising water in the pond... So we thought we should take the rise out of the rising tension of the situation and start pumping out of the pond just in case the plover went under..... STOP PRESS The plover family has increased by 4, our Greenie reports!"



Other significant issues highlighted in the surveys were;

- Loss of wildlife habitat
- Pesticide impact on fauna
- Inappropriate location of golf courses
- Exclusive use of land
- Introduction of weeds

There were another 19 issues which were listed by less than 15% of the surveys. Obviously some issues are important in specific regions, but may not be applicable for all golf courses (eg specific issues related to golf course construction in large resorts).

Question 2.

What would you like to see golf course managers doing to satisfy your concerns?

Increased planting of natives was recommended by over 50% of environmental groups in this survey.

Other practices which the respondents saw as being important were;

- Retain native vegetation
- Increase environmental awareness/education
- Involve golfers/community/environment groups in environmental issues of golf clubs
- Reduce fertiliser use
- Reduce pesticide use
- Use waste water for irrigation

Another 25 practices were identified by less than 15% of the responses. Some of these practices were quite obvious (reduce water usage, use less toxic pesticides) while others were unexpected (publicise benefits of golf courses, use golf courses as examples of good environmental practice, use caddies instead of golf buggies).

Question 3.

What environmental benefits do you believe golf courses provide?

Over 50% of responses identified golf courses as having a benefit in providing a habitat for native flora and fauna and as an important open/green space in urban environments. A list of other benefits were expressed;

- Recreation provider
- Restoration of degraded land
- Improved aesthetics
- Provide environmental appreciation and education for golfers
- Provide examples of good environmental practice

- Use waste/contaminated water
- Act as a bushfire buffer
- Cooling effect in urban environments
- Flood control
- Oxygen production

From the point of view of the golf course industry it was encouraging to see that environmental groups recognise benefits of golf courses. The goal must be to enhance and build on these benefits to ensure golf courses carry out good environmental practice and provide a benefit to the whole community.

Question 4.

How can environmental and golfing groups work together to improve the environmental management of golf courses?

Six different ways were identified in which environmental groups and golf courses could work together to improve golf courses. Of these the first was suggested by over 50% of responses;

- Consultation
- Information
- Community education
- Surveillance and monitoring
- Provide contacts
- Resources

Environmental groups can provide consultation services (in both a paid and voluntary capacity) in relation to environmental management. They are a valuable source of the environmental information that is available to golf course managers, and can help in community education of the management and benefits of golf courses. Monitoring of environmental quality, whether it be water quality, wildlife populations or vegetation communities, can be conducted with the aid of environmental groups. Environmental groups can provide a wide network of contacts to golf clubs in search of specific environmental assistance. They can also provide resources, labour, plants, seeds etc. to use in enhancement of golf courses.

Where to from here?

One of the aims of this project has been to establish communication lines between the golfing industry and environmental groups. To this extent joint projects on native plants, birds and fertiliser management have been planned. Hopefully further development of constructive links between golf courses and environmental groups will be made as a result of this document.

Sorrento Golf Club, Victoria

Golf courses are often perceived by local communities as large areas of land which can only be enjoyed by the elite. In order to get the community involved with the course at Sorrento, the superintendent, Steve Tuckett, invited the local sixth grade over for a visit. Sorrento is a small coastal town 60km south of Melbourne on the Mornington Peninsula.

A class of thirty students walked down from the school, and were taken on a short tour of the course. On the tour they learned about the environmental benefits of golf courses such as providers of wildlife and vegetation sanctuaries and water filtering systems. The aim of the day was to get the students

involved, so they were put to work as part of the club's revegetation program.

*Firstly Steve explained the problems the course was facing from the environmentally damaging weeds Italian Boxthorn (*Lycium spp*), *Coprosma repens*, *Polygala myrtifolia* and Radiata Pine (*Pinus radiata*). Then the students were shown how to plant grasses indigenous to the area, and they planted 3 000 plants in the space of one and a half hours. The local paper, the Mornington Leader was there to take photos and the students were on the front page of the next issue. The club provided a barbeque for the students afterwards and will keep the school updated on the growth of their plants over the next few years.*

S. Tuckett/Sorrento Golf Club



At Sorrento Golf Club, Victoria, students from the local school have aided in extensive planting of native grass species.