



Eco Villages Australia

# Vision Document



## Who we are

Eco Villages Australia (EVA) is a non-profit organisation that provides the legal and financial model to create co-housing eco communities for 15-25 people.

In these communities, residents work co-operatively, make decisions, and take control of their own energy, water and food as they work towards ecological sustainability, social prosperity and financial viability.

The first of these eco villages will be starting in 2019 in South East Queensland. The search for property and the gathering of future residents are currently underway.

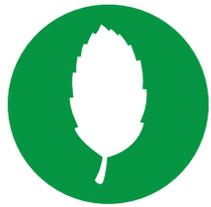
## How it works

EVA Eco villages are collectively owned. Individuals loan money to make the purchase possible which is returned to the contributor with modest interest. All residents pay rent which is used by the community to repay loans, maintain and improve the infrastructure and whatever else the community decide.

# Co-creating a community



Part 1 - Core Vision



Part 2 - Who We Are Looking For



Part 3 - New Communities



Part 4 - Frequently Asked Questions



# Part 1 - Core vision

## 1. Collective Ownership

The concept of land ownership is laughable for many indigenous cultures. At most, humans are stewards of the land. Eco Villages Australia has a model where the land is owned collectively by the non-profit company and held in trust.

All residents rent the spaces they require. This income goes to operational costs and paying back loans. In a sense, no one owns the land and yet everyone owns the land. People can't 'buy-in' to these eco villages.

This structure makes it impossible for individuals to benefit from the sale of land, which means that the land is 'locked away' in perpetuity for affordable housing and wildlife habitat.

This model is beneficial as it:

- prevents sale of lots. Selling lots can lead to breakdown in community over time as lots are sold or bequeathed to people who may have different values from the community.
- is congruent with the concept of being stewards and caretakers of the land.
- keeps costs down through sharing.
- requires all residents to be renters
- allows residents to leave easily if personal circumstances change.
- allows rental income to be spent on things that benefit the community rather than going to banks, shareholders or land owners.



Working together in nature is a key component of eco village life

- is financially sustainable and fair.

## Co-housing

A well designed community creates the right balance of togetherness and privacy. Eco Villages Australia follows the basic elements of the 'co-housing' model, pared-down dwellings surrounding a central common shared space. Clustering housing is the most ecologically responsible style of village design.

"Everyone wants community in their life, but they tend to want the privacy that we're used to

having.... [co-housing] is very different to any commune or anything from the past, in that it really values independence, but at the same time, cooperation and community." Laura Finch - Architect

Co-housing is gaining popularity around the world. In Denmark, around 30% of the population are currently living in co-housing arrangements.

Key things that define co-housing are the unique physical design, care free environment and resident controlled design and

management. The people who live there are the ones who take responsibility for the community rather than landlords. The centre house is normally built first and has shared kitchen, dining/lounge area, laundries and other facilities as the community requires.

A number of dwellings placed around the centre house is referred to as a 'pod'. The village may have a number of pods depending on land size and resident wishes. Each pod would most likely develop slightly different characteristics (one pod might be entirely vegetarian for example).

### 3. Intentional Community

The intention to live together harmoniously with shared values is what makes eco villages different from life in the suburbs or city. Residents of the eco-village eat together often and connect regularly while also having their own interests and outside lives.

### 4. Sustainability

Eco villages typically take control of water, waste and food production to rejuvenate and regenerate people and planet while remaining

financially sustainable (triple bottom line).

#### Ecological Regeneration.

Top priorities in eco villages include reducing waste, reducing emissions and regenerating the natural environment. Some activities may include:

- composting
- using renewable energy
- car-sharing and use of electric vehicles
- use of permaculture and syntropic agriforestry principles to create healthy soil and a diverse eco system
- reducing meat consumption

#### Financial Sustainability

Each community needs sustainable management of their own monetary and physical resources. The eco village social enterprise will make modest surplus and those surpluses will be returned to the community - spent by the wishes of the community.

Eco Villages Australia aims to provide affordable housing rather than assisted housing, but will aim for lower than market rate rentals. Rent will be calculated carefully and fairly to ensure that the eco village is affordable. Costs such as internet, electricity and water will be shared.

At the heart of an eco village is the drive to have a lighter footprint on the world.

#### Social Regeneration

Commuting to work and paying off a mortgage can be a socially depleting way to live for some. Working fewer hours and working in passion areas is key to enjoying life. Residents of the eco village will enjoy the freedom to travel or live in the community part-time. In the future, there may be multiple villages that residents could choose to move between.

### 5. Smaller housing

Many of the issues around housing stem from the fact that Australians have the largest houses in the world. The tiny house movement has exploded into public consciousness. Benefits of smaller housing include:

1. less ecological damage and a smaller physical footprint,
2. a healthier lifestyle with more time outdoors,
3. less cleaning and maintenance,
4. greater flexibility,

5. minimalist lifestyle offering more sharing and freedom and reducing consumerism.

Living spaces could include tiny houses (on wheels or fixed), shared rooms in existing housing already built on a purchased property, or purpose built co-housing.

### 6. Participatory decision-making

The Native Americans said it best: "If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together". Sometimes participatory decision-making is long and difficult, but it's ultimately the best way for a group to "go far".

A community based on respect honours all voices and has a transparent decision-making process. The eco village will operate on a modified consensus approach that draws from sociocracy.

Residents will be trained in consensus decision making as part of the community living course.

As the non-profit has to abide by corporate law, the business side of the organisation will be enacted in the usual way, but the core vision is always that all residents have their voices heard.

## 7. Off Grid

Eco Villages Australia communities will be off-grid as much as possible and practical. Urban centres may be more difficult.

### Composting Toilets

Human waste is toxic when mixed with precious drinking water. Today's compostable toilets are odour free and can contribute to building healthy soil.

### Renewable Energy

Eco villages would utilise solar power and other viable technologies. Energy efficient lights and appliances would be used to reduce energy consumption. Electric vehicles could also be powered by renewable energy.

### Water Management

Water tanks, treatment plants, dams, etc. will be utilised to ensure the water security of the community. Councils are now starting to approve grey water systems where run-off from kitchens and laundries can help plants grow.

## 8. Health Focused

Eco Villages Australia focuses on creating places where healthy living is easy.



*building beautiful structures with renewable materials makes a lot of sense*

### Social Health

Yoga classes, dancing and board games are just a few alternatives to watching mind-numbing television. Social isolation is a growing disease in western society and eco villages are a powerful antidote.

Maintaining good relationships with neighbours and local council is key as is the connection with the larger network of eco villages in Australia and beyond.

### Physical Health

It's a lot easier to have a healthy diet with fewer processed foods when the community members

are growing food, eating and cooking together. EVA communities are illicit drug free.

### Emotional Health

Healthy community also builds emotional health. Working on our own needs and supporting others on their journey is a unique opportunity for us all. Non Violent Communication (NVC) will be taught as part of the community living course, which all residents can look forward to participating in.

Of utmost importance is the integrity of the community itself - it must not only look healthy, but also be healthy. The need to be open and

welcoming must be balanced with the need to spend time fostering deep and supportive relationships between residents.

### **Healthy Positive Culture**

How people feel at the eco village is largely to do with the culture of the community. The sort of things that make a healthy culture are positivity, abundance mindset, transparency and safety. Creating this healthy culture is the responsibility of all residents.

## **9. Diverse**

### **Multi-generational**

Western society has largely taken away the chance for people of different generations to come together. The eco village will include a mix of ages in the community.

### **Financial Capacity**

The Eco Villages Australia financial and business model allows those of all income levels to be a part of the community. Sharing and minimalism is not just for people who have limited funds. Eco village life will be rich and fulfilling, providing a sense of community that money cannot buy.

### **Education**

People from diverse educational backgrounds would be welcome at the eco village. It is expected that eco village life will attract skilled, motivated, creative and educated people.

### **Ability**

Differently abled people are welcome. Everyone has something to contribute to eco village life.

### **Creativity**

The eco villagers will work collaboratively to create a beautiful place to live. Artists, builders, musicians, cooks, carers, green thumbs - everyone can play a part in making the eco village joyful and inviting.

## **10. Sharing Resources**

Unlike many of the communes of the 1960s, EVA villages are non-income or asset sharing communities. Communities will own some shared property and resources (tools, kitchen items, furniture, etc.) which will be managed and maintained by the residents.

Personal possessions will need to fit within personal dwelling space.

Some may bring specialist items that would be unsuitable for communal use (eg. lathes, musical equipment, etc). Renting office/shed/studio space may be possible for these items. The eco village could have libraries of tools, toys, games and books.

Through the simple act of sharing, expenses can be kept down.

### **Moderate Demand**

Intentional communities are often classified as high, moderate or low demand communities. High demand communities often have set beliefs, rigorous practises, could be income and/or asset sharing and often use a hierarchical system of governance.

Low demand communities, on the other hand, ask very little of the community. An example might be a retirement village where people may be attracted by the facilities and the potential of having nice neighbours, but aren't required to be committed to the community.

EVA eco villages will be a moderate demand community, where villagers would be expected to attend work parties and meetings, contributing to the

community and investing in each other.

## **11. Demonstration Eco Village**

Unsustainable housing developments that are designed for isolation are the norm. Rampant consumerism is choking our souls and our environment. Eco villages provide an alternative to this way of living.

By showing an alternative way to live that is ecologically, socially and financially responsible, others may be inspired to start their own eco village or intentional community.

As EVA villages seek to be to a demonstration and a model to our wider society, the eco villages will abide by local laws and be close to population.

## **12. Legal and financial model**

### **Legal Structure**

Eco Villages Australia operates a non-profit company limited by guarantee.

### **Funding the Eco Village**

EVA aims to borrow money outside of the banking system. Each community will seek financial contributions from their potential residents and supporters.

Financial contributors will:

- be paid back as quickly as possible (financial projections will show how loans can be paid back in 12-15 years).
- be protected from legal liability.
- not receive any special rights to make infrastructure decisions or other decisions over the community.
- not have any special claim to village membership and will still need to complete the membership process if they wish to become residents at the eco village.

The entity will undertake to:

- maintain cash reserves and have wait-listed investors, allowing other investors to be paid out quickly if needed.
- handle finances responsibly, which includes good accounting practice, not overspending, and seeking professional advice and services where needed.

### **Bank Loan**

Those wishing to start an eco village may be able to get a loan through EVA as long as 70% of the purchase price can be raised as a deposit. EVA can help create a business plan to ensure that the proposed site is viable. A valuation from a reputable company would also be required.



*permaculture gardens and growing food will be at the core of the village*

### **Risk**

Should the property become no longer viable, the property can be sold. Proceeds of the non-profit cannot be distributed to the members. As required by law, any capital gain after loans are returned, can only be distributed to a non-profit. In this way, risk for financial contributors is minimised.

In the unlikely event that investors have paid into the loan and the land is not purchased, financial contributors will receive their money back. Any small sums of money spent on initial

legal documentation and other administration fees already paid, may be forfeited as outlined in the legal loan deed agreement (available on the Eco Villages Australia website).

### **Zoning**

Eco Villages Australia will seek over time to work closely with local councils to pioneer a code especially for eco villages.

# Part 2 - Who?

In order for eco villages to succeed, it is critical to get the right people.

The sort of people who will make great eco-villagers:

- respect others' need for privacy and alone time.
- can meet the financial needs of the community.
- allow themselves to be vulnerable and trusting.
- subscribe to the values of the community.
- have children who are respectful to others.
- are hard workers and enjoy a challenge.
- take responsibility for themselves and their actions
- can balance their own needs with the needs of the group.
- aim to be non-judgmental and value everyone for who they are.
- have extremely good communication and conflict resolution skills.
- are open to learning new skills.

- have excellent self-awareness and are committed to personal development.
- can cope with constructive criticism and have a history of healthy, positive relationships.

## Membership process

Just like small businesses, communities fail at a rate of around 90%. The community cannot afford to have large egos vying for power, or those who like making conflict for sport. Most successful eco villages have a prolonged process for people to become residents yet make it simple and quick to leave when circumstances change. For this reason, a four step membership process is in place.

### Step One - Village Work Parties.

Volunteers can join the residents to undertake projects at the eco village. It's a great way to get to know people.

### Step Two - Friends of the Village.

At any stage, people may choose to become a 'friend of the village'. This would usually require a small financial contribution.

### Step Three - Provisional Member (Resident)

If a 'friend of the village' would like to become a resident, they would take a series of steps including an expression of interest, an interview and personal references.

Acceptance as a provisional member will be made based on:

1. the application
2. connection to the village
3. space availability

4. community balance (age, gender, skills, etc.)
5. unanimous agreement of existing house pod residents

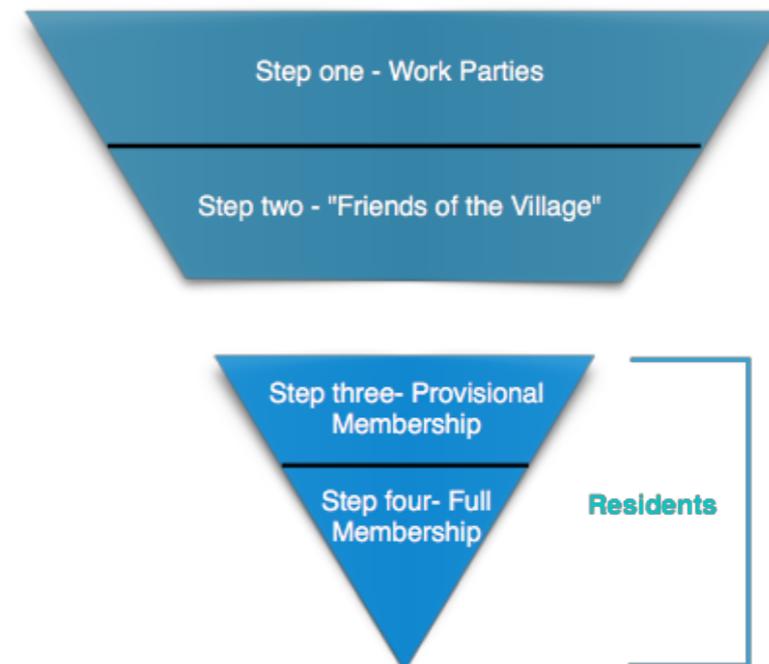
### Step Four - Full Member (Resident)

After 18 months, provisional members will become full members and will be able to become full members.

### Membership fees

The EVA constitution requires a \$20 per year fee.

## Membership Process



# Part 3 - New Communities

Often the hardest thing about starting a community is the financial and legal model. Eco Villages Australia has set up the framework for not just one but many eco communities. The first EVA eco village will be started by the founders in south east QLD in 2019, however, there could be many more sprouting up across the country. Eco villages could be urban or rural and may even work in a block of units..

People who are interested in setting up an eco village of their own can use the Founders Vision pro forma (excerpt and example below right) to outline their vision Contact us and we can help you seed another community!

# Part 4 - FAQ's

**Q: How much to 'buy in'?**

**A:** People cannot buy shares or lots in an EVA village but rather loan money for the land purchase. Those who cannot afford to loan are still able to apply as renters.

**Q: So everyone has to rent?**

**A:** Yes. All people rent according to the space they need.

**Q: Do people who loan more get more say?**

In our individualist world, sharing has become a radical act of civil disobedience.

**A:** No. The day-to-day decisions are made by consensus. People don't have to loan to be a resident just as people don't need to be a resident to support the project with a loan.

**Q: Why a rental model?**

**A:** The concept of land ownership has been destructive to our environment and society. Collective ownership is an empowering way to change a broken system.

**Q: What if there aren't enough people willing to loan money to the project?**

**A:** A bank loan may be possible as long as the community members can

FOUNDERS VISION - Excerpt and example

Issue	Your Values	EVA's Preference/ Rationale
Spirituality		Unobtrusive peaceful practise welcome
Smoking		No
Pets		Up to the founders / community
Illicit Drugs		See policy
Alcohol		Preference for no alcohol, but responsible use of alcohol may be permitted by the community
Shared Meals		Non compulsory, but one main meal offered each day. It's scientific fact that eating together is the number one factor in a close community.
Plastic Free / Zero Waste		
Diet		
Phone use in public areas		None
Contribution		
Noise Level's		Noise. We would expect that noise levels would be time limited, and natural quiet would be the preference. (festival nights would be the exception :)
Visitor length of stay		Visitors may stay free for, say 2 nights, after which they would need to pay (for room, van space etc) These decisions need to be made early on and be transparent and communicated.

raise 70% of the money.

**Q: Why collective ownership?**

A: If one person owns the land, there is a power imbalance. If a number of individuals own the land, it becomes toxic when conflict arises. But someone or something needs to own it in today's world - A non-profit entity is the perfect choice

**Q: Why not an incorporated cooperative?**

A: Queensland has weak cooperative laws. Running the eco village as a non-profit company allows the same outcome - a cooperatively run entity with opportunities for grant funding.

**Q: What happens when the loan is paid off. Do we still have to pay rent?**

A: Good question! This will be up to each community. Perhaps rent could be reduced, abolished, or perhaps the community will wish to upgrade infrastructure, fund a business or even seed a new community.



“While we love our friends dearly, we keep dreaming of our tribe. It seems we have this persistent memory of tribal living - of being an integral part of a self-sustaining circle that includes humans and other beings, as well as the piece of Earth they call home. Living here (in suburbia), we see our friends every couple of weeks if we are lucky: That’s not tribe. I’m greedier than that. I want to wake up and see them at breakfast, weed the garden later elbow to elbow while we talk, stop to help them build their house, participate in meetings where we plan our lives together. I want to know them deep in where the hurt lies and offer little bits of healing daily. And most of all I want to be on land we share ‘til we die and are scattered there, mixing and mingling ashes, as we did our lives”

**Patricia Green. p163 “Finding Community” Diana Leafe Christian**