

6.2 CLIMATE EMERGENCY

Submitting Councillor: Cr Fergeus & Cr Saloumi

MOTION

That Council agrees that we are facing a climate emergency and that urgent action is required by all levels of government.

COUNCILS DECLARED

The following 96 Australian Councils have declared a Climate Emergency:

Adelaide, Adelaide Hills, Alexandrina, Armidale, August-Margaret River, Ballarat, Ballina, Banyule, Bass Coast, Bayside, Bega Valley, Bellingen, Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Brimbank, Broken Hill, Burnside, Byron, Campbelltown, Canada Bay, Canterbury Bankstown, Cardinia, Central Coast, Charles Sturt, Clarence Valley, Darebin, Denmark Shire, East Fremantle, Frankston, Fremantle, Gawler, Glen Eira, Glen Innes Severn, Greater Dandenong, Greater Geelong, Greater Shepparton, Hawkesbury, Hepburn Shire, Hobart, Hobsons Bay, Holdfast Bay, Hunters Hill, Indigo, Inner West, Kiama, Kingborough, Kingston, Lane Cove, Launceston, Light, Lismore, Manningham, Maribyrnong, Melbourne, MidCoast, Mildura, Mitcham, Moonee Valley, Mosman, Mount Alexander, Mount Barker, Mornington Peninsula, Moyne, Mundaring, Murray Bridge, Newcastle, Noosa, North Sydney, Northern Beaches, Port Adelaide Enfield, Port Lincoln, Port Phillip, Queenscliffe, Randwick, Ryde, Salisbury, Stonnington, Surf Coast, Swan, Sydney, Tweed, Upper Hunter, Victor Harbor, Victoria Park, Vincent, Warrnambool, Waverley, Willoughby, Wingecarribee, Wollongong, Woollahra, Yarra, Yarra Ranges.

BACKGROUND

In November 2018, Council passed the following motion proposed by Cr Fergeus, Cr Saloumi and Cr Little:

That Council:

1. *Notes the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's recent special report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5 °C¹;*
2. *Notes in particular the following findings of the report, issued with a high degree of confidence by the IPCC:*
 - i) *Human activities are estimated to have caused approximately 1.0°C of global warming above pre-industrial levels;*
 - ii) *Global warming is likely to reach 1.5°C by as early as 2030;*

¹ <http://report.ipcc.ch>

- iii) Warming from anthropogenic emissions from the pre-industrial period to the present will persist for centuries to millennia and will continue to cause further long-term changes in the climate system, such as sea level rise, with associated impacts;*
 - iv) Climate-related risks for natural and human systems are higher for global warming of 1.5°C than at present, but lower than at 2°C;*
 - v) Climate-related risks to health, livelihoods, food security, water supply, human security, and economic growth are projected to increase with global warming of 1.5°C and increase further with 2°C;*
 - vi) Most adaptation needs will be lower for global warming of 1.5°C compared to 2°C;*
 - vii) In model pathways with no or limited overshoot of 1.5°C, global net anthropogenic CO₂ emissions decline by about 45% from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching net zero around 2050;*
 - viii) Pathways limiting global warming to 1.5°C with no or limited overshoot would require rapid and far-reaching transitions in energy, land, urban and infrastructure (including transport and buildings);*
 - ix) Stated mitigation ambitions as submitted under the Paris Agreement would not limit global warming to 1.5°C, even if supplemented by very challenging increases in the scale and ambition of emissions reductions after 2030;*
 - x) Avoiding overshoot and reliance on future largescale deployment of carbon dioxide removal (CDR) can only be achieved if global CO₂ emissions start to decline well before 2030;*
 - xi) Strengthening the capacities for climate action of national and sub-national authorities, civil society, the private sector, indigenous peoples and local communities can support the implementation of ambitious actions implied by limiting global warming to 1.5°C;*
3. *Acknowledges the unprecedented levels of urgency declared by the IPCC and other scientific bodies with regard to the need to drastically reduce emissions and limit global warming to 1.5°C.*

The report also noted the IPCC's findings² on the difference in impact of 1.5 versus 2 degrees of warming:

- i) Extreme heat would be much more common, with 37% of the world population exposed to extreme heat at 2C rather than 14% at 1.5C, with the tropics experiencing the biggest increase in "highly unusual" hot days;
- ii) Sea levels would be at least 10 centimeters higher (50 cm as opposed to 40 cm) by the end of the century at 2C warming than they would at 1.5C, causing mass migration from areas that may be flooded;
- iii) The rate of sea level rise increase by 30% at 2C;
- iv) The availability of freshwater in parts of the world will reduce 9% at 1.5C warming and up to 17% at 2C;

² <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

- v) Heatwaves will increase 1.1 months of the year at 1.5C and up to 1.5 months at 2C;
- vi) The Arctic would be sea-ice free at least 1 in every 100 years at 1.5C but an alarming 1 in every 10 years at 2C;
- vii) The loss of species is between 200 and 300% worse at 2C as opposed to 1.5C, with as many as 16% of plant species lost and 18% of insects lost;
- viii) Permafrost melting will be 38% worse at 2C, leading to further release of methane and impacting on increased global warming beyond 2C;
- ix) 2C will result in an estimated 3 million tonne decrease in yield from marine fisheries, twice as bad as under 1.5C;
- x) Wheat production will reduce by 9% at 1.5C but up to 16% at 2C;
- xi) 90% of reefs are at risk at 1.5C and 98% at 2C, meaning 2C almost certainly sounds the death knell for the entirety of the Great Barrier Reef;
- xii) If we remain at our current levels of emissions, we are on a path to warming 4C by 2100, which if reached would trigger a chain of cataclysmic changes that include extreme heatwaves, declining global food stocks, substantial species extinctions and sea-level rising that would affect hundreds of millions of people.

In July 2018, Council passed a motion proposed by Councillor Fergeus supporting and authorising the Mayor, Cr McCluskey, to sign the Joint Statement from Australian Mayors crafted by the Cities Power Partnership, of which Council is a member. The statement reads as follows:

“As members of the Cities Power Partnership local government climate alliance, we demand national action and call upon the Federal Government to join us in making tackling climate change the top priority.

At the local level we’re working with our communities and with each other to develop a strong climate response, and to support Australia’s shift to clean energy.

All tiers of government have a role to play in driving down Australia’s greenhouse gas pollution, and we need swift action at the Federal level to address our escalating national emissions.

We demand three major actions from our Federal leaders:

- xiii) Strong national climate policy aligned to the science and a national commitment to rapidly transitioning to 100% clean energy;*
- xiv) Support the rapid phase out of fossil fuel subsidies which contribute to climate change;*
- xv) Provide long-term finance to support implementation of clean energy and sustainable transport, such as rooftop solar, battery storage, electric vehicle charging stations, public and active transport infrastructure in council and community areas.”*

In August 2019, Council rejected a report from Council’s Environmental Advisory Committee which advised Council to declare a Climate Emergency. This report proposed that Council:

- I. *Notes that the latest available emissions data shows Australia has increasing, not reducing, carbon emissions³;*
- II. *Notes that the Municipal Association of Victoria State Council (May 2019) and the Australian Local Government Association National General Assembly (June 2019) have both declared a climate emergency;*
- III. *Notes that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports that at current levels of emissions we are on a path to warming 4C by 2100, which if reached would trigger a chain of cataclysmic changes that include extreme heatwaves, declining global food stocks, substantial species extinctions and sea-level rising that would affect hundreds of millions of people.*
- IV. *Notes that South-Eastern suburbs, including Clayton, are among the most at-risk from heatwaves caused by the current trajectory of global warming⁴;*
- V. *Notes that the average annual number of days above 35 degrees in Melbourne is likely to increase from the current 9 days per annum up to 26 days by 2070 if immediate action is not taken to reduce emissions⁵;*
- VI. *Notes that weather related disasters have increased worldwide and in 2019 cost approximately US \$215 billion⁶;*
- VII. *Notes that Council has already identified tackling climate change as the top priority for governments in Australia (July 2019);*
- VIII. *Responds to these matters and the concerns noted by Council in November 2018, raised by the publication of the October 2018 Special Report of the IPCC, by:*
 - a) *Joining more than 915 jurisdictions around the world at the time of writing - including the United Kingdom, Portugal, Canada, Ireland, the ACT, Auckland, Canterbury, Catalonia, Geneva, Warsaw, San Francisco, Sydney, Los Angeles, New York, Melbourne, Hobart, Wales, Scotland, Argentina, Ballarat, Newcastle, Paris, Naples, Darwin - in acknowledging that we are facing a climate emergency and that urgent action is required by all levels of government;*

³ <https://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/resources/408fcc37-dcfd-4ab8-a4f9-facc6bd98ea6/files/nggi-quarterly-update-dec-2018.pdf>

⁴ Monash University - <https://www.monash.edu/news/articles/6639>

⁵ <https://www.environment.gov.au/climate-change/climate-science/impacts/vic>

⁶ Weather, Climate and Catastrophe Insight – 2018 Annual Report;

- b) *Acknowledging that it is still possible to restore a safe climate and prevent most of the anticipated long-term climate impacts – but only if societies across the world adopt an emergency mode of action that can enable the restructuring of the physical economy at the necessary scale and speed;*
- c) *Giving priority to policy and actions that will provide for both mitigation and adaptation in response to accelerating global warming and climate change;*
- d) *Acknowledging Council’s work on climate change to date, in particular the work of Sustainable Monash and the Environmental Advisory Committee;*
- e) *Incorporating Council’s response to the Climate Emergency as a key feature of the 2021-2025 Council Plan;*
- f) *Developing a whole of council Climate Emergency Action Plan to complement Council’s Environmental Sustainability Strategy and enhance local resilience and reduce climate impacts in a timeframe that is as fast as practicably possible, in line with scientific evidence and advice. This should incorporate community consultation and take into account the extensive work being done by other sub-national governments in this space.*

2019-20 BUSHFIRE SEASON

The 2019-20 bushfire season has set new records, creating catastrophic conditions across much of Australia. For the first time catastrophic bushfire conditions have been declared for Greater Sydney. Bushfire conditions in Australia are now more dangerous than in the past, and the risk to people and property has increased. For well over 20 years, scientists have warned that climate change would increase the risk of extreme bushfires in Australia. This warning was accurate. The Climate Council reports that extreme fire weather will continue to become more frequent and severe without substantial and rapid action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions⁷.

The Climate Council’s 12 November 2019 briefing paper ‘This is Not Normal’⁸, details a number of key findings:

- The catastrophic fire conditions of the 2019-20 bushfire season have been aggravated by climate change;
- Bushfire conditions are now more dangerous than in the past;
- The fire season has lengthened so substantially that it has already reduced opportunities for fuel reduction burning;
- The costs of fighting fires are increasing;

⁷ <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/not-normal-climate-change-bushfire-web/>

- The government must develop an urgent plan to rapidly phase out the burning of coal, oil and gas which is driving more dangerous fires.

DISCUSSION

This summer, as local authorities are confronted daily by the wholesale destruction of their communities, Australians have demanded they will respond quickly and responsibly to the crises which are unfolding.

Climate change inaction by the Australian Government has been reported world-wide, while many local representatives of fire ravaged areas have been on the front foot presenting their responses to their constituents.

On Thursday 9 January 2020, a week after Premier Daniel Andrews declared a State of Disaster in six local government areas and alpine areas, Noel Towell reported for *The Age*:

....“the state government has confirmed it will comply with its obligations under its own Climate Change Act and impose emissions cuts targets of no less than 20 per cent by March 31.

The state’s main advisor on its interim emissions targets, former federal Labor politician Greg Combet, says the severity and the extent of the bushfires has sharpened the national focus on climate change and called on some politicians to “stop denying the science”.

Mr Combet’s expert panel’s longer term advice is even more ambitious, calling for cuts of up to 60 per cent by 2030, more than twice the target being pursued by the federal government.”

This target can only be achieved if all levels of government commit to rapidly reducing emissions. It requires all levels of government to accept that Earth is facing a climate emergency and that business as usual is not an option.

Having experienced the hottest summer on record and fires still burning, Australia has seen firestorms impacting on six states simultaneously. More than 2000 homes raised, at least 26 people dead, thousands displaced and livelihoods lost. The deaths of a billion animals, loss of crops and plant species.

Smoke has been so dense that it even spread to New Zealand and caused the Government to mobilise the mass distribution of P2 masks to those affected by smoke along Australia’s East coast. Pollution in Canberra – worse than New Dehli – has been so hazardous that government offices were forced to close for up to two days. This is unprecedented.

“Canberra’s air quality has been among the worst of major cities in the world. The highest index ratings were recorded on New Year’s Day where it peaked at 5185 - more than 25 times above hazardous levels. An air quality index above 200 is considered to be hazardous.” Lucy Bladen in The Canberra Times, 10 January 2020

The social, environmental and economic impacts will be felt for years.

Local Councils are the closest level of government to their communities and are expected to provide leadership.

Can Council afford to ignore the climate emergency any longer?

DECLARATION OF CLIMATE EMERGENCY

The reason to acknowledge and declare a climate emergency is to mobilise society-wide resources at sufficient scale and speed to protect civilisation, the economy, people, species, and ecosystems. This can be achieved through building public awareness of the climate emergency which threatens life as we know it. Appropriate action can be taken if we recognise that an emergency exists.

A declaration of a climate emergency will also act as a public signal indicating that governments and society will be driven to tackle the emergency until such time as it has passed. Business-as-usual is no longer an option.

At the time of writing over 1,751 jurisdictions around the world have declared that we are facing a climate emergency and that urgent action is required by all levels of government.

In Australia, where the climate emergency declaration mobilisation and petition was launched in May 2016, jurisdictions representing more than 8.5 million people have declared a climate emergency.

This includes the Municipal Association of Victoria State Council (May 2019), the City of Sydney, the City of Hobart, and the Australian Local Government Association National General Assembly (June 2019).

Following on from declaration is it critic, so is the development of Climate Emergency Plan, to help guide our actions and play a role in addressing the emergency. Divestment in fossils and our energy efficiency initiative have contributed positive action, but a plan will help us to move forward.

IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT⁹

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) has stated that responding to climate change is now core business for Councils. The essential services and infrastructure councils provide to the community are vulnerable to a range of climate hazards. Because of their local knowledge

⁹ Department of Land, Environment, Water and Planning
https://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0023/73049/Climate-Change-Risks-to-Local-Government_FINAL.pdf

and close connection to the community, councils are often best placed to help the local community reduce risks and adapt to climate change.

Decisions about the location, construction and maintenance of infrastructure (e.g. buildings, roads, bridges, pathways, drainage) should consider the risk to this infrastructure from climate change. This includes adapting existing infrastructure, particularly for assets that deliver critical services to the community.

Drought, changes in average temperatures or extreme events may affect local flora and fauna over the short and long term.

Many Victorian councils already understand the impact of drought on the maintenance of local parks, and sports and recreation facilities. Increasing heat exposure also poses risks to people using council sport facilities and active outdoor spaces.

Heatwaves will also increase in frequency and intensity, putting people at risk. This is especially serious in urban areas, where the urban heat island effect increases temperatures even further. Poor quality housing can expose residents to extreme heat. Residents of low-density settlements where public transport is harder to access can also face compounding stresses including lack of access to services and rising fuel costs.

Vulnerable people in the community are at greater risk of sickness, death and significant financial and social impact from climate change. This includes those who already receive community care, the sick or disabled, indigenous, low income, socially isolated, elderly and very young, and CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) communities. Those people also with poor quality housing and limited access to cool spaces face increased vulnerability to heatwave.

Council staff, infrastructure and services will be affected by climate change. Council workers may be directly exposed to the impacts of climate change, which can affect their health and safety and reduce the productivity of the organisation. Outdoor workers are at particular risk from heat stroke. Community care workers may experience increased demand for their services. Council public services may be interrupted by storm, heat, flood or fire. Council infrastructure will need increased maintenance and face more frequent failure. Councils could be liable for decisions that do not take account of widely accepted climate risk.

CLIMATE EMERGENCY RESPONSE

A suitable response to the climate emergency should contribute to:

- Providing maximum protection for the community of Monash and for people, civilization and species globally, especially the most vulnerable;

- Restoring a safe climate at emergency speed by eliminating greenhouse gas emissions and enabling drawdown of excess carbon dioxide in the air;
- Encouraging research to find safe ways to protect people, species and civilization from near-term dangerous temperatures, while zero emission and carbon dioxide drawdown strategies are being enacted;
- Enabling our community to be resilient in the face of any unavoidable dangerous climate impacts;
- Engaging, empowering and mobilizing governments, communities and organisations to take action on and achieve these goals with certainty and at emergency speed.

ALIGNMENT WITH COUNCIL PLANS AND STRATEGIES

This notice of motion aligns with the Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2016-2026, the Healthy and Resilient Monash Integrated Plan 2017-2021, and the Council Plan 2017-2021.