

Our ref: R06/0046 Out:33285

6 September 2021

Endorsed by the LGNSW Board
in October 2021

Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy Taskforce
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Submitted online

National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy

Local Government NSW (LGNSW) is the peak body for local government in NSW, representing NSW general purpose councils and related entities. LGNSW facilitates the development of an effective community-based system of local government in the State.

LGNSW welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy Taskforce. Due to the short timeframe of the Inquiry, this is a draft submission awaiting review by LGNSW's Board. Any amendments will be forwarded in due course.

LGNSW advocacy priority

Urgent action is needed to address the climate emergency in a bipartisan manner to make clear, effective and unambiguous steps to avert a climate crisis in Australia. This call to action is a resolution of the 2019 LGNSW annual conference led by City of Ryde, and reflected in similar motions from North Sydney, Blue Mountains, Lismore, Bellingen and Parkes Councils.

NSW councils have identified four priority areas for action to address climate change:

- a) reduction of Australia's carbon emissions through effective mitigation strategies;
- b) planning for and adapting to a changing climate;
- c) significant structural adjustment in businesses and communities which may arise from transitioning to a low carbon economy and adapting to the impacts of climate change; and
- d) the provision of leadership and support for both councils and their communities.

Background

Australia is very vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and even a 1.5°C increase in warming will have severe impacts on local government assets and services that must be managed. Climate change has the potential to damage council assets, cause serious disruptions to the delivery of council services, generate unbudgeted financial impacts and affect the wellbeing of the community, particularly those vulnerable to weather extremes. NSW local government is prioritising reducing carbon emissions and adaptation to avoid the worst impacts. More than 82% of NSW councils have undertaken a climate change risk assessment and are implementing adaptation responses.

Response

The Australian Government has stated its role as:

- provide national science and information
- manage Commonwealth assets and programs
- provide leadership on national adaptation reform
- maintain a strong, flexible economy and a well-targeted social safety net.

The Department's factsheet on roles highlights that an all of government response is to set the right conditions through policy settings and regulatory arrangements. Without seeing the draft Strategy it is unclear from the Australian Government's description of its role whether leadership on national adaptation reform will include altering the Government's policy settings.

LGNSW is concerned with the lack of detail in the Australian Government's approach and strategy. A national adaptation approach is needed as some vulnerabilities are best addressed through Commonwealth policy levers such as taxation, the National Construction Code, Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme (NatHERS), import controls etc. There is also a role for national co-ordination and assessing interdependencies between infrastructure owners and governance systems, especially for assets and services that cross jurisdictions. A national strategy must also be backed-in by the political will to act and enact the policies required at the scale and speed required to make a meaningful difference.

The factsheet tasks Local Government with facilitating the building of resilience and adaptive capacity in the local community, including through providing information about relevant climate change risks. As climate change impacts will be experienced at regional and local levels, councils may be best placed to manage these risks¹.

While this assignment of responsibility seems to support the notion of subsidiarity; the principle that powers and responsibilities should be left with the lowest level of government practicable; it has only been applied in a narrow, decentralised sense which ignores broader and more supportive attributes of the principle. Local government is the most active in engaging with the community and developing adaptation pathways. However, councils are also the least resourced level of government and councils alone can't mitigate the impacts of a changing climate that doesn't respect council boundaries.

Local government, working in partnership with state, territory and federal governments, can deliver highly effective projects that adapt to a changing climate.

In NSW, LGNSW has partnered with the NSW Government to provide funding for councils to implement adaptation strategies. Councils' work in this area is diverse with projects building community resilience by testing personal emergency response plans, looking at landform and drainage in low lying coastal areas, urban cooling interventions for extreme heat days, finding alternatives for potable water for road maintenance in times of drought, managing mosquito-borne disease risk, developing guidance on resilient construction materials, protecting vital

¹ Productivity Commission [inquiry into barriers to effective climate change adaptation](#), 2012.

communication assets from failing in extreme heat, and managing increasing algal blooms in water supplies due to increased heat, just to mention a few.

Councils and communities are ready to step up to tackle climate change in a way that can stimulate economic growth and gain efficiencies in the management of their assets. Many councils have already responded to the climate change challenge by adopting proactive strategies to reduce emissions and to adapt to unavoidable climate change impacts through climate change risk assessments and adaptation plans. For other, less prepared councils, particularly smaller councils in regional areas, financial assistance from the State and Federal Governments may also be needed to undertake this planning.

Having identified potential solutions to the challenges, councils will need additional help to implement local projects. Implementation of these projects could have the added benefit of reducing the need for disaster recovery funding.

NSW local government has identified that shifting policy settings are a barrier to local climate change action. Businesses also need confidence that policies and the mechanisms to achieve them are consistent with Australia's international commitments and will not change drastically in the future. There is strong public support for climate change action and bipartisan agreement on climate policy is essential so that other levels of government, industry, and the market can make informed decisions around investment in emissions reductions and manage climate risks with an increased level of certainty.

Conclusion

Climate change poses significant disruption to our wellbeing, economy and to the natural environment. It is imperative that the Australian Government takes urgent action to address the climate emergency. Local government is a willing partner to collaborate on climate change risk assessments and adaptation pathways.

For further information in relation to this submission, please contact Denise Anderson, Senior Policy Officer - Environment on 02 9242 4056 or denise.anderson@lgnsw.org.au.

Yours sincerely



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