

Framework for Effective Local Government Climate Emergency Response



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What is the climate emergency and restoration of a safe climate

Climate emergency is understood in two ways:

1. The climate emergency **situation** refers to catastrophic changes to the world's climate caused by human activity and resulting in a loss of a safe climate, which threatens all life on earth.

This aspect of the climate emergency is extensively documented. The science tells us that the earth has warmed, and is continuing to warm, and as a result we face serious consequences for the atmosphere, for weather systems, for human ability to produce food, and indeed for all people and species.¹²

2. The climate emergency **response** refers to a specific approach to tackling climate change, which seeks to mobilise and take action at a **scale** and **speed** that will restore a **safe climate**, with the least possible loss and damage during the transition back to a safe climate.

The target is to provide **maximum protection** globally for all species and all people.

A **safe climate** allows existing and future generations, communities and ecosystems to survive and flourish. We know that the current climatic conditions are not safe for a huge range of species and are increasingly unsafe for millions of people.

A 1.5°C rise is not considered safe, and will not avoid dangerous climate change.³

To restore a safe climate we need a rapid transition to zero emissions across all sectors, as well as the drawdown of all the excess greenhouse gases in the air.

'Business as usual' and incremental or gradual improvements will not be enough.

The technical solutions needed to transition to a zero emissions economy and beyond have been identified by science and research. What is needed now is appropriate political action and rapid implementation of the solutions.



Local government role in the climate emergency response

Local governments are fundamental in the climate emergency response.⁴ Experience is showing that local government is the best place to start government commitment to climate emergency action across the world - with so many councils it has been possible to find communities that are keen to be early movers on the climate emergency. Innovation is also more likely to be initiated at the local government level, because with so much diversity at this level of government different approaches to responding to the climate emergency will emerge. Local governments are also in a good position to network and learn from each other.

A lot can be practically done at a local government level, and councils have a large role in eliminating emissions across their municipality.

Councils also have an enormous legacy and experience in educating and working with their community. Typically, people have much more interaction with a council than other levels of government.

It is a natural progression that local councils can not only provide services and support through a climate change lens, but can also assist with channelling their community's desire for advocacy to state and federal governments.

It is not sustainable, practical or effective enough for the responsibility to lie solely with local councils. State and federal government policy, legislation and funding will have the biggest impact on the climate emergency. At the state and national level, policy changes needed include transitioning to 100%

renewables; ending native deforestation; switching to electric or zero emissions transport; changes to agriculture; and minimum energy standards for buildings. We need a bipartisan approach to the climate emergency to enable the necessary scale and speed of action, such as that which was seen during the World War Two response.

In acknowledging the climate emergency, government authorities (no matter how small) should take responsibility for trying to engage the world in achieving the goal of restoring a safe climate. Since global action is needed, this means a council needs to act substantially via influence rather than via only what it can directly control.

Key processes in effective climate emergency response

Five Key Processes

PROCESS 1

Taking leadership: Declaring a climate emergency

By declaring or acknowledging the climate emergency, your council is recognising the catastrophic changes to the world's climate caused by human activity and resulting in a loss of a safe climate, which threatens all life on earth. Your council is also committing to tackling climate change, by taking urgent action at a scale and speed that will restore a safe climate.

Example:⁵

'That Council recognises that we are in a state of climate emergency that requires urgent action by all levels of government, including by local councils.'



PROCESS 2

Get your house in order: Embed climate emergency action in all council strategies, plans and actions

Council has many levers to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and begin drawing down excess greenhouse gas emissions.

After declaring a climate emergency your council should develop a Climate Emergency Plan. This should outline all actions your council will take to embed a climate emergency response into its operations.

Engagement and advocacy should be a fundamental part of the Climate Emergency Plan.

Actions should include (but not be limited to):

- Switching to 100% renewable energy
- Getting off fossil gas
- Implementing energy efficiency across all facilities/buildings
- Redrafting procurement policy and practices to ensure suppliers to council are using renewable energy and resource recovery
- Embed climate emergency thinking into strategic planning and update planning schemes
- Refocus transport priorities to drive the shift to fossil fuel free transport
- Create a circular economy aimed at zero waste
- Increase your urban forest and/or revegetation activities
- Community education and empowerment to take action
- Increase community resilience to climate change impacts.

Climate emergency action also needs to be embedded across all of council, and reflected in all policies and strategies of council.

Inwards engagement with all staff and units of council is essential, particularly ensuring education and empowerment of managers happens early on.

PROCESS 3

Mobilise and build the climate emergency mandate: Get your community active

The current political situation combined with the climate emergency itself can seem an overwhelming, insurmountable problem, so large that it is difficult to imagine how our individual actions can have effect. By working together we can find the solutions locally, nationally and globally.

Councils can support our communities to take action, through raising awareness about the climate emergency; providing targeted programs to make homes and businesses powered by renewable energy; or mobilising volunteers to spread the climate emergency message to neighbourhoods, families, and workplaces.

Councils can show the community how to become politically active to encourage and motivate state and federal governments to act. Some ways for communities to become politically active are to join a climate action group and contact their state and/or federal member of parliament.

PROCESS 4

Global movement building: Reach out to other councils

Since the first council climate emergency declaration in 2016, we now have two national governments, eight state-level governments and over 600 local governments having declared, and this is rising every week.

The climate emergency movement has gained a huge momentum in a very short time because councils and their communities have been reaching out to engage their peers across their state, nation and globally. The current experience shows that this is a highly effective way of building the movement, and the necessary base of a democratic mandate for climate emergency action.

We now need to act strategically and collaboratively to figure out the key challenge: how we can make an effective and meaningful response beyond the declaration.

You can follow who has declared a climate emergency here: <https://www.cedamia.org/global/>, and reach out to other councils to learn and share.

PROCESS 5

Upwards: Advocate to state and federal government

Councils cannot do the safe climate restoration work alone, and it is state, federal and global levels which will have the most powerful impact on the climate emergency. Collaborative campaigns - involving partners such as other councils, educational institutions, industry groups and community organisations - must advocate for effective action and significant changes to state, federal and international government policy, legislation and funding.



Key challenges for local governments

- The scale and speed required is not the pace government administrations usually move at.
- Moving 'beyond business as usual' when this is not yet reflected across society or at state or federal levels.
- Not having control of all the levers or mechanisms necessary to implement the required changes, and needing policy change at state and federal levels.
- Re-prioritising budgets and resources to address the climate emergency, whilst still needing to deliver essential services and maintaining community support.
- Gaining the community mandate and understanding for a massive prevention program before climate catastrophe is fully felt.
- Embedding the response across the administration, which will take time, education and resources.
- Working in uncharted territory where there is as yet no set plan for how to undertake an effective climate emergency response.

1 <http://www.bom.gov.au/state-of-the-climate/2016/>

2 Spratt, David (2018) "Beyond urgent: the science of climate warming as existential risk". Presentation to Darebin Climate Emergency Conference <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KaEfK-MII4U>

3 Hansen, J., Sato, M., Kharecha, P., von Schuckmann, K., Beerling, D. J., Cao, J., Marcott, S., Masson-Delmotte, V., Prather, M. J., Rohling, E. J., Shakun, J., Smith, P., Lacs, A., Russell, G., and Ruedy, R.: Young people's burden: requirement of negative CO₂ emissions, *Earth Syst. Dynam.*, 8, 577-616, <https://www.earth-syst-dynam.net/8/577/2017/>.

4 <http://www.caceonline.org/>

5 <http://www.caceonline.org/motions-to-declare-a-climate-emergency.html>

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