



# Climate Change Policy Statement

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### Version tracking

Version number	Date	Author	Comments / Modifications
1	February 2018	Laura Simes	Major revision of 2009 Climate Change Policy Statement.

ONE70  
LV1, 170 Railway Parade  
West Leederville WA 6007

(08) 9213 2000

## 1.0 Policy Statement

### Local Government acknowledges:

- I. The science is clear: climate change is occurring now, and human activities are the dominant cause.
- II. Climate change threatens human societies and the Earth's ecosystems.
- III. Climate change requires urgent action to mitigate against catastrophic climate change and to adapt to the climate change that is now unavoidable.
- IV. Mitigation and adaptation strategies must be efficient, effective and equitable.
- V. A failure to adequately address this climate change emergency places an unacceptable burden on future generations.

**Local Government is committed** to acting on climate change, and are already active in climate change mitigation and adaptation, but an effective response to climate change requires strong action, leadership and coordination at all levels of government.

**Local Government is calling for** adequate Commonwealth and State policies, programs and funding to underpin climate change action, in particular, for climate change adaptation.

## 2.0 Rationale

### 2.1 The science is clear

**Local Government supports the scientific consensus that climate change is happening now, and human activities are the dominant cause.**

Local Government cites the *Fifth Assessment Report*, the latest report of the consensus-based Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which finds:

*Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia. The atmosphere and ocean have warmed, the amounts of snow and ice have diminished, sea level has risen, and the concentrations of greenhouse gases have increased<sup>1</sup>.*

*Most aspects of climate change will persist for many centuries even if emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> are stopped<sup>2</sup>.*

*Surface temperatures will remain approximately constant at elevated levels for many centuries after a complete cessation of net anthropogenic CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Due to the long time scales of heat transfer from the ocean surface to depth, ocean warming will continue for centuries. Depending on the scenario, about 15 to 40% of emitted CO<sub>2</sub> will remain in the atmosphere longer than 1,000 years. It is virtually certain that global*

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<sup>1</sup> IPCC (2013). Summary for Policymakers. In: Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA at 4. Available at: <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/>.

<sup>2</sup> As above, at 27.

*mean sea level rise will continue beyond 2100, with sea level rise due to thermal expansion to continue for many centuries<sup>3</sup>.*

Local Government also cites a recent CSIRO study which determined “*there is less than 1 chance in 100,000 that global average temperature over the past 60 years would have been as high without human-caused greenhouse gas emissions*”, that is, a certainty of 99.999% that humans are driving climate change<sup>4</sup>.

## 2.2 Climate change is a global threat, and Australia has committed to being part of the solution

As a signatory to the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Australia has committed to taking action on climate change and to ensuring that mitigation and adaptation action is equitable and consistent with the aims of the SDGs.

**Local Government is committed to meeting international obligations through Australia’s participation in protocols and agreements established under the UNFCCC, including but not limited to the Paris Agreement and successor international treaties.**

**Local Government notes** the Paris Agreement expressly recognises the importance of engagement at all levels of government<sup>5</sup>, and **are committed** to contributing to national and international emissions reduction targets to achieve the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global temperature rise to well below 2° Celsius and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5° Celsius.

However, **Local Government acknowledges** that current worldwide commitments under the Paris Agreement are insufficient to achieve even the 2° Celsius goal<sup>6</sup>. Australia is a developed country with amongst the highest per capita emissions in the world<sup>7</sup>. Recognising this, **Local Government demands the Federal Government commit to a more ambitious target.**

**Local Government recognises** that both the impacts of climate change and the policy responses required to contribute to the avoidance of dangerous climate change have significant equity implications. These equity considerations have domestic and international

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<sup>3</sup> As above, at 28.

<sup>4</sup> P Kovic, M Howden & S Crimp (CSIRO) (2014). “99.999% certainty humans are driving global warming: new study”, *The Conversation*, 4 September 2014. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/99-999-certainty-humans-are-driving-global-warming-new-study-29911>.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations / Framework Convention on Climate Change (2015) *Adoption of the Paris Agreement*, 21<sup>st</sup> Conference of the Parties, Paris: United Nations at 2. Available at: [http://unfccc.int/files/home/application/pdf/paris\\_agreement.pdf](http://unfccc.int/files/home/application/pdf/paris_agreement.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Climate Action Tracker (Climate Analytics, Ecofys & NewClimate Institute) (2018). “Improvement in warming outlook as India and China move ahead, but Paris Agreement gap still looms large”. 13 November 2017. Available at: <http://climateactiontracker.org/publications/briefing/288/Improvement-in-warming-outlook-as-India-and-China-move-ahead-but-Paris-Agreement-gap-still-looms-large.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Australia has the highest per capita emissions of the OECD countries, and is seventh in the world after Kuwait, Brunei, Qatar, Belize, Oman and Bahrain: CAIT Climate Data Explorer (World Resources Institute) (2018). *GHG Emissions Totals Excluding Land Use Change and Forestry Per Capita 2014*. Available at: <http://cait.wri.org/historical>.

dimensions, implications for both present and future generations, and for the survival of other species.

**Local Government supports an equitable transition to a carbon constrained world:**

- **globally**, the right of developing countries to increase their share of global wealth in ways that remain within the ecological capacities of the planet;
- **domestically**, the need to equitably share the cost of climate change adaptation and mitigation and ensure socioeconomically disadvantaged groups receive adequate support.

**Local Government supports the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and support climate change action as part of a broader sustainable development agenda.**

### **2.3 Local Government is already acting on climate change, but all levels of Government must act**

Climate change is a key issue for Local Governments that impacts almost all aspects of their operations and responsibilities. Local Government has, for a number of years, been actively engaged in a range of climate change mitigation and adaptation activities, together with education and encouraging awareness and behaviour change amongst residents.

**Local Government stresses that climate change is a matter of national significance, and is a direct responsibility of both the State and Federal Governments. The State and Federal Governments have an obligation to address climate change in cooperation with Local Governments, and in consultation with the Australian community as a whole.**

There is currently little in the way of long-term State and Commonwealth plans or resources directed to climate change action. There is a particularly significant policy vacuum within the Western Australian Government, with negligible demonstrated or coordinated leadership or long-term planning.

Australia and the world is already seeing a broad scale shift away from fossil fuels towards energy efficient and renewable technologies that includes widespread uptake of rooftop

solar<sup>8</sup>, battery storage<sup>9</sup>, energy trading<sup>10</sup>, virtual power plants<sup>11</sup> and electric vehicles.<sup>12</sup> The market, business, insurers, many Local Governments, and (other) State Governments are moving in this direction. Local Governments are calling on the Western Australian and Federal Governments to catch up, to remove regulatory barriers, to support and accelerate the movement towards a low carbon, energy efficient and sustainable society.

#### **Local Government calls on the State and Federal Governments to:**

- **take a strong leadership and coordination role;**
- **engage in long-term planning on climate change;**
- **ensure all action is evidence-based, and guided by the scientific consensus on climate change;**
- **consider amending their investment strategies and /or policies to invest in financial institutions which do not fund fossil fuel, directly or indirectly, subject to minimum credit risk and portfolio exposure limits; and**
- **embed climate change mitigation and adaptation in the Government projects and policies** (including procurement, land management, development etc.).

#### **Local Government seeks State and Federal Government cooperation in:**

- removing existing barriers to climate mitigation actions by Local Governments;
- actively supporting Local Governments to take mitigation and adaptation actions where appropriate, without placing undue liability for the delivery of such actions on Local Governments;
- taking direct responsibility for the delivery of mitigation actions, adaptation and resilience planning in areas that lend themselves to centralised coordination at State or Federal level; and
- partnering with and resourcing Local Governments to deliver community emissions reduction programs that are most effectively implemented at the Local Government level.

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<sup>8</sup> See for example: A Bruce & I MacGill. "FactCheck Q&A: is Australia the world leader in household solar power?" The Conversation. 28 March 2016. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/factcheck-qanda-is-australia-the-world-leader-in-household-solar-power-56670>.

<sup>9</sup> See for example: N Harmsen. "Elon Musk's giant lithium ion battery completed by Tesla in SA's Mid North". ABC News. 24 November 2017. Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-23/worlds-most-powerful-lithium-ion-battery-finished-in-sa/9183868>; Climate Council. *Renewables and Storage Powering Australia*. 2018. Available at: <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/uploads/d4a4f17c09c83d03f13234051e3e77d8.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> See for example: K Diss, "Blockchain technology fuels peer-to-peer solar energy trading in Perth start-up". ABC News. 11 October 2017. Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-11/blockchain-technology-fuels-peer-to-peer-energy-trading-start-up/9035616>.

<sup>11</sup> See for example: C Chang. "South Australian government strikes deal with Tesla to install free batteries to 50,000 homes". *News.com.au*. 5 February 2018. Available at: <http://www.news.com.au/technology/innovation/south-australian-government-strikes-deal-with-tesla-to-install-free-batteries-to-50000-homes/news-story/fd04731350da176c374383f3fb25e947/>.

<sup>12</sup>A Gray. "Countries are announcing plans to phase out petrol and diesel cars. Is yours on the list?" *World Economic Forum*. 26 September 2017. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/09/countries-are-announcing-plans-to-phase-out-petrol-and-diesel-cars-is-yours-on-the-list/>.

State Government leadership is required in the following areas:

- a **‘joined up government’ approach to climate change**, so that climate change action is coordinated and cohesive throughout State Government, with clear lines of responsibility, and accountability for required actions;
- **climate change adaptation and building resilience**, which requires an overarching strategic view, and a strategic approach to progressing and funding action (eg, actions arising from Local Government coastal hazard mapping and adaptation planning);
- **driving mass LED public lighting retrofits**, which is an area where regulatory hurdles and unaligned incentives continue to hinder action by Local Governments;
- undertaking a major revision and update to the **Western Australian Government’s Climate Change Strategy**<sup>13</sup>;
- ensuring that **statutory planning policies** are consistent with climate change mitigation priorities (eg, maintaining urban forest to reduce heat island effect, best practice building energy efficiency etc); and
- in the absence of effective State-level climate change policy, the **Environmental Protection Authority must take a greater regulatory role** in assessing and recommending conditions to mitigate the greenhouse gas emissions associated with major projects within the Environment Impact Assessment process.<sup>14</sup>

Local Government has, in the past, been key delivery agents of Australian Government mitigation programs. **Local Government calls on the State and Federal Governments to implement climate change policy and programs that take advantage of the substantial emissions reductions that can be achieved by Local Governments and their communities.**

## 2.4 Local Government urges effective mitigation action

**Local government recognises that we are in a state of climate emergency which requires urgent action.**

**Local Government is committed** to reducing operational GHG emissions and supporting the reduction of GHG emissions in the community.

**Local Government recognises** that Australia has the capacity to contribute to global climate change mitigation, by reducing emissions now, in a way that creates positive opportunities for communities, industries and our economic sustainability.

**Local Government acknowledges** a successful response to the challenge of climate change requires cross-sectoral action by government, business and the community.

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<sup>13</sup> Western Australian Government (2012). *Adapting to our Changing Climate*. Available at: <https://www.der.wa.gov.au/images/documents/your-environment/climate-change/adapting-to-our-changing-climate-october-2012.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> See commentary on State climate change in the EPA’s *Annual Report 2016-2017* at 38-40. Available here: [http://www.epa.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/Annual\\_reports/EPA%20Annual%20Report%202016-2017.pdf](http://www.epa.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/Annual_reports/EPA%20Annual%20Report%202016-2017.pdf).

**Local Government considers** a wide range of policy measures - from regulatory intervention and market-based mechanisms (such as an emissions trading scheme) through to voluntary schemes, education and behaviour change programs - are required to successfully achieve appropriate and adequate emission reduction targets.

In the absence of an effective market-based mechanism at the Federal level, **Local Government calls on the Federal Government** to introduce an interim greenhouse trigger under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation legislation.<sup>15</sup>

Local Governments can be key delivery agents for mitigation projects, including, but not limited to:

- renewable energy projects (small scale and large scale);
- energy efficiency projects (eg, mass LED public lighting retrofits);
- waste management;
- enabling take-up of new renewable and sustainable technologies; and
- accelerating the take up of low or zero emissions vehicles (within Local Government fleets, but also more broadly, eg, through the installation of more electric vehicle charging stations).

## 2.5 Local Government urges effective adaptation and resilience planning

**Local Government stresses** that the effects of climate change are now unequivocally being felt, as they respond to current effects of climate change, and plan for a changed climate into the future.

**Local Government is committed** to contributing to the common goal of ensuring that Western Australia's human communities and natural ecosystems have the resources and other assistance necessary to enable them to build maximum resilience and adapt to climate change impacts that are now understood to be unavoidable.

**Local Government asserts** that it is the responsibility of all spheres of Australian Government to ensure that all current regulation and policies take into consideration the likely impact of climate change on current and future human settlements, natural resources and ecosystems and facilitate adaptation to these. These policies should include but not be limited to those pertaining to disaster relief, national security, infrastructure and land use planning, water, energy, housing, health, transport, environment and energy.

**Local Government notes** there are few policies, programs and limited funding for coastal adaptation in Western Australia, but this is not sufficient, and there is currently only *minimal* capacity and resourcing to adapt to other effects of climate change, such as changes in

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<sup>15</sup> As recommended in the A Hawke *Independent review of the EPBC Act 1999*, at 12. Available here: <http://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/resources/5f3fdad6-30ba-48f7-ab17-c99e8bcc8d78/files/fact-sheet-5-climate-change.pdf>.



temperature and rainfall, extreme weather events such as heatwaves, bushfires and floods, along with flow-on effects such as the health impacts of climate change<sup>16</sup>.

Local Governments simply do not have the financial capacity to shoulder the financial cost of protection measures required in response to rising sea levels and more frequent extreme weather events. This must be a shared responsibility. **Local Government demands** that adequate funding be provided by the State Government for hazard and risk mapping, together with the priority adaptation measures identified through this process. The State Government should follow the examples of other States, such as New South Wales and Queensland, who have devoted substantially more resources for this purpose (noting both States have significantly less coastline than Western Australia<sup>17</sup>).

**Local Government is calling for effective adaptation and resilience planning, by all levels of government, including:**

- ensuring the Western Australian planning system adequately incorporates consideration of climate change effects and adaptation issues;
- hazard identification and planning beyond coastal planning, into current and expected effects of changes change on extreme weather events, bushfires, biodiversity, health etc.;
- sustainable management of water resources;
- providing greater certainty for Local Governments in knowing what action is necessary to manage their own risk and liability flowing from adaptation planning decisions;
- a State-Wide Coastal Hazard Map, and coastal management legislation in Western Australia to define and establish principles, objects, actions, roles and responsibilities for integrated coastal zone management;
- a formalised coordinated approach, potentially in the form of a State/Local Government partnership agreement or an Intergovernmental Agreement taking in all levels of government, establishing consistent and coordinated principles, objectives and actions across Australia;
- adequate assistance, including funding, for Local Governments engaged in adaptation action.

**Local Government is calling for emergency management and disaster relief policies that adequately incorporate climate change in their planning and implementation.**

Western Australia Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (WANDRRA) financial measures need to provide funding to reinstate a damaged or destroyed asset to a more disaster resilient standard, where this is an appropriate and cost effective response based on likely recurrence of the disaster event.

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<sup>16</sup> For a summary of Western Australian adaptation policies, refer to 'Western Australian Local Government action on climate change' in Appendix - Background Information below.

<sup>17</sup> As above.

## Appendix

### Background Information

**Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC):** is the international body for assessing the science related to climate change. IPCC assessments provide a scientific basis for governments at all levels to develop climate related policies, and they underlie negotiations at the UN Climate Conferences. IPCC reports undergo multiple rounds of drafting and review to ensure they are comprehensive and objective and produced in an open and transparent way. Thousands of other experts contribute to the reports by acting as reviewers, ensuring the reports reflect the full range of views in the scientific community.

**Paris Agreement:** The first-ever universal, legally binding global climate deal, adopted by 195 countries at the UNFCCC Conference of Parties in Paris, December 2015. It aims to respond to the global climate change threat by keeping a global temperature rise this century well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5°C. It aims for global greenhouse gases to peak as soon as possible, and seeks to foster resilience and climate adaptation. Full text of the Paris Agreement is available [here](#). As of November 2017, all 195 countries have signed on to the Paris Agreement. The United States of America has indicated an intention to withdraw (it is unable to withdraw until November 2020). Further information tracking country ratifications and targets is available [here](#).

**Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** In September 2015, 193 countries (including Australia) agreed to the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets. The SDGs are a successor to the Millennium Development Goals, but unlike the Millennium Development Goals, relate to all developed and emerging countries, as well as developing countries. They aim to end poverty, hunger and inequality, take action on climate change and the environment, improve access to health and education, build strong institutions and partnerships, and more. Aims include climate action (Goal 13), affordable and clean energy (Goal 7), responsible consumption and production (Goal 12) and sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11). For further information on how the SDGs are relevant to Local Governments, see the Global Network of Cities, Local and Regional Government (UCLG) publication "The Sustainable Development Goals: What Local governments need to know", available [here](#).

**United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC):** an international environmental treaty adopted on 9 May 1992. The UNFCCC objective is to "stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system".

**Western Australia Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (WANDRRA):** provides a range of financial relief measures to assist communities to recover from an eligible natural disaster event, jointly funded by the Western Australian and Australian Governments, which reimburses Local Governments for the restoration and replacement of

essential public assets owned by a local government to the extent necessary to restore the asset to the equivalent of its pre-disaster standard.

**Western Australian Local Government action on climate change:** WA Local Governments have, for a number of years, been actively engaged in a range of climate change mitigation and adaptation activity, together with education and encouraging awareness and behaviour change amongst residents. Many Local Governments have made voluntary commitments or pledges in relation to climate change, including the following:

Pledge	Description	Number of Local Government Participants
<b>Local Government Climate Change Declaration</b>	Developed by WALGA. A voluntary opportunity for Local Governments to demonstrate their political commitment to locally appropriate climate change adaptation and mitigation action. <sup>18</sup>	40 (representing 65% of the WA population)
<b>Divesting from fossil fuels</b>	Commitment to shift money out of banks that fund fossil fuels. <sup>19</sup>	12 (representing 30% of the WA population)
<b>Compact of Mayors</b>	A coalition of city leaders around the world committed to addressing climate change. <sup>20</sup>	4
<b>Cities Power Partnership</b>	Launched July 2017 by the Climate Council, aims to celebrate and accelerate emission reductions and clean energy in Australian towns and cities. <sup>21</sup>	10

In the past, Western Australian Local Governments have been key delivery agents of Commonwealth Government climate change mitigation programs, such as the Community Energy Efficiency Program (CEEP), the Local Government Energy Efficiency Program (LGEEP) and the Cities for Climate Protection (CCP) Program that was delivered by ICLEI with Commonwealth Government support. The LGEEP and CEEP grants assisted Local Governments in undertaking a wide range of building energy efficiency, LED public lighting and geothermal projects.

<sup>18</sup> For further information see here: <http://walga.asn.au/Policy-Advice-and-Advocacy/Environment/Climate-Change.aspx>.

<sup>19</sup> For a list of Australian Local Governments that have committed to divest see here: <http://gofossilfree.org.au/fossil-free-councils/>. Not listed are City of Bayswater, City of Subiaco and the Shire of Mundaring, which have also recently committed to divest.

<sup>20</sup> Cities of Joondalup, Perth, Melville and Mandurah. Further information about the Compact of Mayors available here: <https://www.compactofmayors.org/>.

<sup>21</sup> Local Governments participating in the Cities Power Partnership are shown on the map here: <http://citiespowerpartnership.org.au/power-partners/>.

Program	Program dates	WA Local Government participants
Cities for Climate Protection	1999-2006	30
Local Government Energy Efficiency Program (LGEEP)	2011-2014	50 (includes 1 WALGA grant)
Community Energy Efficiency Program (CEEP)	2011-2016	15 (includes 1 WALGA grant)
Emissions Reduction Fund (ERF)	2014-present	2 (both transitioned from the Carbon Farming Initiative)

Adaptation is a current issue for Local Government, particularly as the effects of climate change are now unequivocally being felt, and Local Governments are in a position where they need to be planning for further effects of climate change in the future. The Western Australian State Government provides around \$1.3 million funding per year under the CoastWest, Coastal Management Plan Assistance Program and Coastal Adaptation and Protection programs. In contrast, the New South Wales State Government (with a coastline one sixth the length of Western Australia), is providing \$63 million over five years. The Queensland State Government (with a coastline a little over half the length of Western Australia) provides \$12 million dollars over three years. The Western Australian state planning system has encompassed coastal adaptation planning, this has not yet been expanded to deal with other current and expected issues such as changes in temperature, rainfall and extreme weather events (including floods), heatwaves and bushfires.