

7.1 PRIORITISING COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Submitting Committee: Environmental Advisory Committee

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. *Notes that the latest available emissions data shows Australia has increasing, not reducing, carbon emissions¹;*
2. *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.*
3. *Notes that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports that at current levels of emissions we are on a path to warming 4°C 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.*
4. *Notes that South-Eastern suburbs, including Clayton, are among the most at-risk from heatwaves caused by the current trajectory of global warming².*
5. *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 emissions³;*
6. *Notes that weather related disasters have increased worldwide and in 2019 cost approximately US \$215 billion⁴.*
7. *Notes that Council has already identified tackling climate change as the top priority for governments in Australia (July 2019);*
8. *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:*
 - *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;*
 - *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*

¹ <https://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/resources/408fcc37-dcfd-4ab8-a4f9-facc6bd98ea6/files/nggi-quarterly-update-dec-2018.pdf>

² Monash University - <https://www.monash.edu/news/articles/6639>

³ <https://www.environment.gov.au/climate-change/climate-science/impacts/vic>

⁴ Weather, Climate and Catastrophe Insight – 2018 Annual Report;

- enable the restructuring of the physical economy at the necessary scale and speed;*
- *Giving priority to policy and actions that will provide for both mitigation and adaptation in response to accelerating global warming and climate change;*
 - *Acknowledging Council's work on climate change to date, in particular the work of Sustainable Monash and the Environmental Advisory Committee;*
 - *Incorporating Council's response to the Climate Emergency as a key feature of the 2021-2025 Council Plan;*
 - *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.*

“RIGHT NOW, WE ARE FACING A MAN-MADE DISASTER OF GLOBAL SCALE. OUR GREATEST THREAT IN THOUSANDS OF YEARS: CLIMATE CHANGE. IF WE DON'T TAKE ACTION, THE COLLAPSE OF OUR CIVILISATIONS AND THE EXTINCTION OF MUCH OF THE NATURAL WORLD IS ON THE HORIZON.” – SIR DAVID ATTENBOROUGH

INTRODUCTION

The Environmental Advisory Committee would like to propose that Council considers declaring a climate change emergency, in line with current data, the global response and current commitments. Following the declaration, the Committee would also like to propose that a Climate Emergency Action Plan be prepared to guide Monash to respond to the impact of a climate emergency.

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 °C⁵;*
2. *Notes in particular the following findings of the report, issued with a high degree of confidence by the IPCC:*

⁵ <http://report.ipcc.ch>

- 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;*
 - 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 findings⁶ on the difference in impact of 1.5 versus 2 degrees of warming:

- Extreme heat would be much more common, with 37% of the world population exposed to extreme heat at 2°C rather than 14% at 1.5°C, with the tropics experiencing the biggest increase in "highly unusual" hot days;
- Sea levels would be at least 10 centimetres higher (50 cm as opposed to 40 cm) by the end of the century at 2°C warming than they would at 1.5°C, causing mass migration from areas that may be flooded;

⁶ <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

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- The rate of sea level rise increase by 30% at 2°C;
 - The availability of freshwater in parts of the world will reduce 9% at 1.5°C warming and up to 17% at 2°C;
 - Heatwaves will increase 1.1 months of the year at 1.5°C and up to 1.5 months at 2°C;
 - The Arctic would be sea-ice free at least 1 in every 100 years at 1.5°C but an alarming 1 in every 10 years at 2°C;
 - The loss of species is between 200 and 300% worse at 2°C as opposed to 1.5°C, with as many as 16% of plant species lost and 18% of insects lost;
 - Permafrost melting will be 38% worse at 2°C, leading to further release of methane and impacting on increased global warming beyond 2°C;
 - 2°C will result in an estimated 3 million tonne decrease in yield from marine fisheries, twice as bad as under 1.5°C;
 - Wheat production will reduce by 9% at 1.5°C but up to 16% at 2°C;
 - 90% of reefs are at risk at 1.5°C and 98% at 2°C, meaning 2°C almost certainly sounds the death knell for the entirety of the Great Barrier Reef;
 - If we remain at our current levels of emissions, we are on a path to warming 4°C 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 2019, Council passed a motion proposed by Cr 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:

- Strong national climate policy aligned to the science and a national commitment to rapidly transitioning to 100% clean energy;
- Support the rapid phase out of fossil fuel subsidies which contribute to climate change;

- 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.”

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 915 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 millions of 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), as well as Melbourne, Ballarat, Brimbank, Yarra, Moreland, Maribyrnong and Darebin Councils here in Victoria alone.

Following on from declaration, which is critical, 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 GOVERNMENT⁷

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

⁷ 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, civilisation 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.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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

CONCLUSION

The Environmental Advisory Committee would like to propose that Council declares a climate change emergency, in line with current data, the global response and current commitments. Following the declaration, the Committee would also like to propose that a Climate Emergency Action Plan be prepared to guide Monash to respond to the impact of a climate emergency. Attachment 1 highlights past and current actions that council is taking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and how this could be integrated into a Climate Emergency Action Plan.

ATTACHMENT 1**Building on Council initiatives under a Climate Emergency Declaration and Plan**

With around 200,000 residents and being the second largest employer with major industry outside Melbourne, Monash is the 6th highest generator of emissions overall in Greater Melbourne and 16th for residential emissions per person in Victoria.

Past Community Satisfaction Survey surveys in the last two years have highlighted that there has been increasing importance placed on environmental sustainability and a growing expectation that Council has a strong role to play.

The EAC committee's proposal to declare a climate emergency can provide the opportunity to consolidate many activities that Council is already doing or developing into a Climate Emergency Plan while acknowledging what work has been done to date. Guided by the Environmental Sustainability Strategy and related documents, Monash Council has:

- 1) Progressively reduced our gas and electricity use over the last 5-10 years.
- 2) Converted all our public lighting in local streets to energy efficient lighting.
- 3) Put in place an Environmental Sustainability Design Policy in 2016 relevant to all new builds of 3 or more across Melbourne.
- 4) Purchases 20% Green Power for large market sites (55% of our energy use)
- 5) Provides Solar bulk buy and advice for the community to provide more access to renewable energy and reduced GHG emissions.
- 6) Completed and is implementing a number of strategies to support our local trees, biodiversity and open space, and offset urban heat island effect.
- 7) Joined [City Power Partnership](#) and [Take 2](#) to pledge our key actions and put forward a recognition statement for the IPCC report last year.
- 8) Improved the fuel efficiency of our Council fleet.
- 9) Supported four large Environmental Upgrade Agreements, leading to a \$1.6million business investment into solar and energy efficiency.
- 10) Is implementing our current Integrated Health and Wellbeing Plan which includes references to community resilience to climate change.

- 11) Facilitates Sustainable Building tours and a range of workshops to help the community live more sustainably and value their local environment.
- 12) As a member of the Eastern Alliance of Greenhouse Action, supported a regional level to advocate for state and federal support, and sharing of resources between Councils for a more effective change.

Council recently committed to:

- 1) Participate in a tender to move to 100% renewable energy for our electricity use by entering a power purchase agreement with over 40 councils and also investigate further solar.
- 2) The roll out of FOGO (food organics in the green bin) which will not only divert waste from landfill for reuse but significantly reduce GHG emissions.
- 3) Assessing 8 major council buildings for opportunities to reduce energy and improve amenity which identified over 50% reduction in the potential to reduce energy and greenhouse gas emissions.
- 4) Participate in the [How Well Are We Adapting](#) project with 18 other councils to develop indicators to assess and prepare our community resilience to Climate Adaptation as a lead council.

A Climate Emergency declaration action plan would provide a framework which can help to bring together and prioritise our current activities and plans while aligning Monash with this global movement.

This plan would need to be supported by a detailed communications plan, integrate into Council operations and can be designed as a resource for the community as well, to know what they can do themselves and with council. It would show Council and the community that the various actions are not piecemeal but rather a well thought out plan to combat the Climate Change Emergency. In many ways it is a repackaging of many things that are already done while prioritising action to mitigate and adapt to Climate Change.