

Sydney to Declare a Climate Emergency in Face of National Inaction

By Isabella Kwai

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SYDNEY, Australia — Sydney, the largest city in a country acutely vulnerable to global warming, moved on Friday to declare a climate emergency, joining hundreds of local governments around the world in calling for urgent steps to combat the crisis, some in the face of inaction by national politicians.

The declaration does not include any major new actions. But Mayor Clover Moore said it was important that Sydney, which has already made ambitious pledges to reduce greenhouse emissions, raise its voice in a global demand for action.

“Cities need to show leadership, especially when you’re not getting that leadership from the national government,” Ms. Moore said.

Amanda McKenzie, chief executive of the Climate Council, a research center, said Sydney’s declaration — which the City Council is expected to easily approve — underlined “just how serious the climate change issue is.”

“It is a genuine crisis,” she said. “Sydney has responded in an appropriate way.”

Australia, home to some of the most extreme natural environments on the planet, is recovering from the hottest summer on record — a season of raging wildfires, burning fruit on trees, and crippling drought in farming regions.

But in national elections last month, voters rejected the major party calling for stronger action on climate change, delivering a surprise victory to the incumbent conservative government, which has resisted proposals to sharply reduce carbon emissions.

The conservative coalition was propelled to victory in part by support in the state of Queensland, where the state government cleared the way this month for a fiercely contested coal mine.

Federal action has been similarly lacking in the United States, where President Trump has called climate change a hoax and moved to withdraw the country from the Paris climate accord.

In that void, state and local governments have taken up the mantle of action, with lawmakers in New York State this week approving a plan to virtually eliminate carbon emissions by 2050. New York joined a half dozen Western states like California in setting a goal of a carbon-free future.

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Canada's House of Commons passed a motion this week declaring a national climate emergency, and Britain this month proposed legislation that would bring the country's net greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2050.

In Australia, where greenhouse emissions have risen for the last four years, Sydney has set a goal of reducing carbon emissions by 70 percent by 2030, and reaching net zero by 2050.

The city has made sustainability a priority for more than a decade, Ms. Moore, the mayor, said. Sydney has collaborated with owners of commercial buildings to reduce emissions, replaced streetlights with LEDs, and committed to

purchase only renewable energy by 2020. It also plans to host a climate conference for female leaders next year, Ms. Moore said.

Other local governments in Australia that have declared climate emergencies said it was crucial that the announcement be followed by action.

Darebin, a local council in Melbourne that in 2016 became the first in the world to declare a climate change emergency, is reviewing its waste and recycling systems, using 90 percent recycled content for road surfacing, and aiming to double solar power generation over four years.

“It was a unanimous decision,” said Darebin’s mayor, Susan Rennie. “People in our community are very disappointed by leadership by other levels of government.”

Criticizing inaction at the federal level, Ms. Rennie said that “it flies in the face of common sense to say it’s an emergency, and we’ve said so, and we’ve done nothing,” she added. “That’s like saying the house is burning down and we’ve done nothing to save it.”

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