



# CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN

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Upper Hunter Shire Council declared a state of Climate Emergency in 2019. This document introduces the Council's strategy to meet the challenges of climate change, as well as detailing specific supporting actions.

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## Message from Mayor and General Manager

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The Upper Hunter Shire is a truly wonderful place to call home. Whether it be the landscape, the assortment of flora and fauna, the rich history, or the locals, there is much to love about this region. The way of life that we currently enjoy, however, is under threat.

The impacts of climate change do not discriminate: it doesn't matter your age, where you live, what you do. Each of us will be affected and each of us must do our part.

This document outlines a range of measures Council will pursue in response to climate change. Council can't do it all though – we need the community's assistance. I encourage you to consider how you may be part of meeting this challenge.

**Cr Maurice Collison**  
Mayor



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Climate change is being responded to at all levels of Government and across all sectors. The potential long-term effects have been felt no more acutely than in our region. Devastating drought and equally devastating bushfires are fresh in everyone's minds.

Our role as a Council is many faceted. The way we conduct our business contributes to the changing climate, through the waste we produce and the energy we consume. We also have a role in educating, influencing and assisting the community. Whether it be through various school programs, committees we facilitate or our procurement practices there are a range of opportunities where Council can support the community in its efforts combatting climate change.

This is no short-term, easy fix scenario. The Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan is a key step along a major journey that Council is committed to.

**Greg McDonald**  
General Manager



# Introduction

Climate change is arguably the greatest global challenge of our time. Improved understanding of its causes and awareness of its impacts has helped promote climate change to the top of international dialogue. From rising sea levels to more extreme weather conditions it is a challenge before all of us and will take a concerted effort by all to overcome. Immediate and ongoing action is required. Not meeting this challenge now will only lead to greater difficulty in dealing with the effects of climate change in the future.

Whilst it is a global issue, the solutions are often considerably varied when distilled down to the local and individual level. The purpose of this document is to introduce how Upper Hunter Shire Council plans to tackle the challenge of climate change and how it will support the community to do the same.



## Global Context

Climate Change is not a recent phenomenon. On the world stage it has been discussed for several decades. Many countries have banded together in response through the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and more recently the Paris Agreement of 2015. It has been acknowledged that limiting global warming requires swift, far-reaching changes across all facets of society.

## National Context

In its most recent publication, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicts “increases in the frequency and intensity of hot extremes” as well as worsening “agricultural and ecological droughts”.

Within the Australian Government, the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources is tasked with helping Australia respond to climate change and meet its obligations under the Paris Agreement. This assistance can be via policy and regulation development, targeted investment and incentives and other supporting mechanisms.

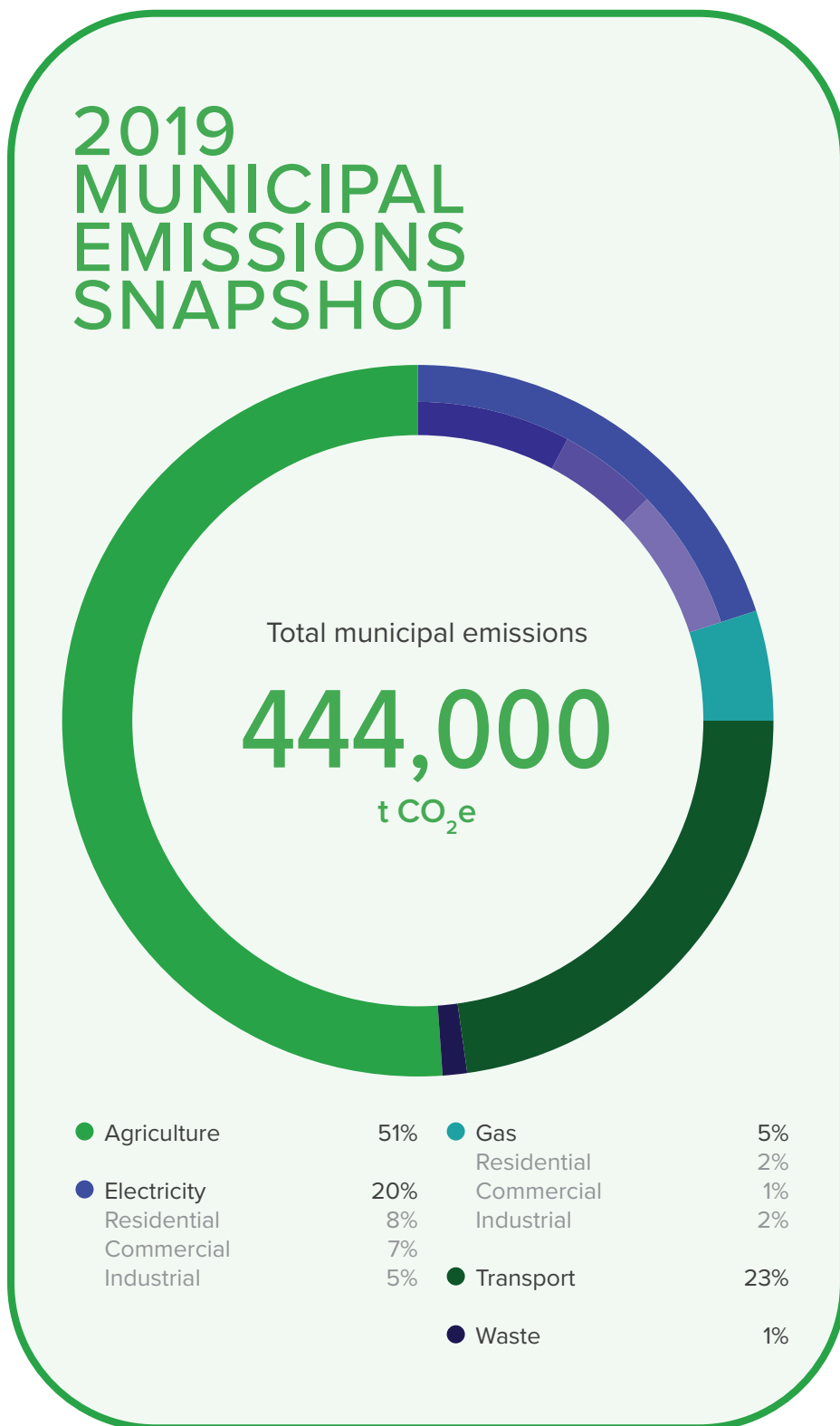
The Australian Government has committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 26-28 % below 2005 levels by 2030.

## State Context

The NSW Government is aiming to deliver a 35% cut in emissions by 2030 compared to 2005 levels. The current plan is part of a broader goal of reaching net zero emissions by 2050.

## Local Context

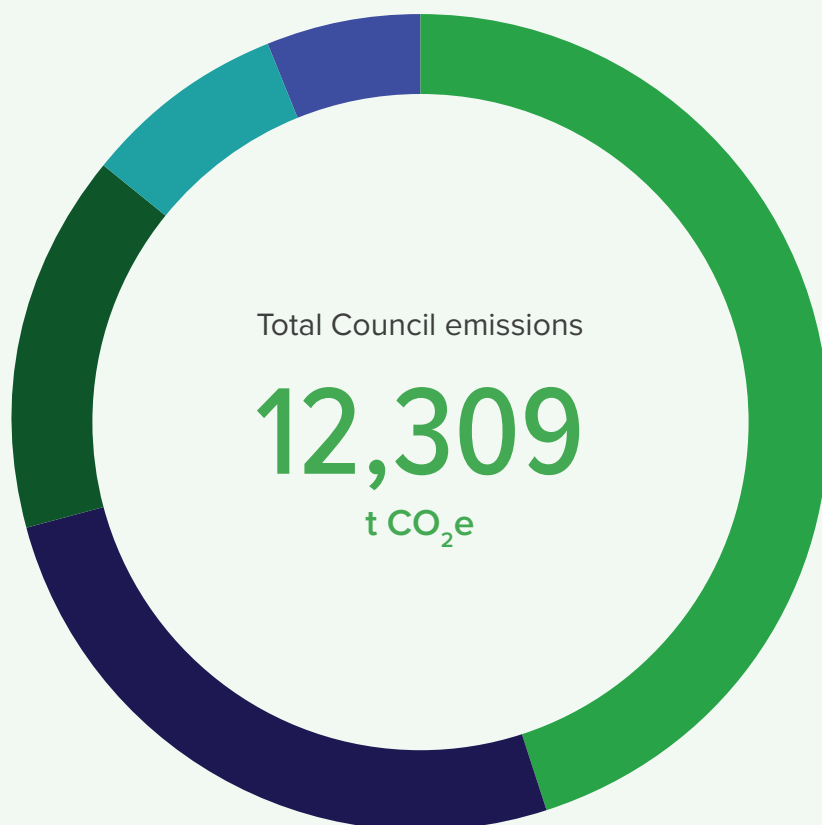
The Upper Hunter Shire is dominated by the agriculture industry sector. It has low urban density and is large in geographical area in comparison to the state average. A 2019 estimate of emissions generated within the shire was 444,000 t CO<sub>2</sub>e.



Key risks facing the Shire as a result of climate change include: water security, weather impacts on livestock, crops and residents, increased fire activity, increasing periods of drought, flood frequency and heatwaves.

In 2018 A 60 kW solar PV system was installed at the Scone Administration Building, supplying a third of the building's energy.

## COUNCIL EMISSIONS



### Council Context

In 2019 Upper Hunter Shire Council (UHSC) acknowledged the importance of climate change by declaring a state of Climate Emergency. Subsequent to that resolution UHSC formally began its journey to lower its environmental footprint by announcing a target of becoming carbon neutral by 2030. This Strategy has been developed with this timeframe in mind.

An exercise was undertaken in 2020 to determine Council's corporate greenhouse gas (GHG) footprint, which found Council's total annual emissions was approximately 12,309 t CO<sub>2</sub>e (which represents less than 3% of the Shire's total emissions).

Reducing this footprint is a key way that Council can contribute to the fight against climate change. Whilst doing so will help reduce the extent of climate change in future years, some level of change is inevitable, so Council must also look at how it can better deal with what is to come.

# Strategy

This Strategy sets out to provide the framework that will support Upper Hunter Shire Council's efforts in reducing the extent and effects of climate change. It is aimed at reducing Council's own environmental impacts as well as supporting the greater community to reduce theirs and also to improve resilience against the impending impacts. From the outset a key goal was to produce an uncomplicated, workable Strategy in order to provide the greatest chance of achieving meaningful outcomes.

In meeting the challenge of climate change, Upper Hunter Shire Council will:



Establish a series of mitigation and adaptation actions



Participate in appropriate industry and government associations



Collaborate with other public, private and not-for-profit enterprises



Support the community and local business through targeted educational activities, funding and other resource sharing activities



Benchmark activities against other organisations



Carry out all activities in an open and transparent manner



Seek support, either financial or otherwise, through grant mechanisms and the like



Monitor and track progress towards meeting climate change targets including Council's target of becoming carbon neutral by 2030.



# Action Plan

Dealing with climate change is not just about lowering emissions, but also about building resilience. We can mitigate as well as adapt.



# Mitigation Actions - Council

A number of actions will directly impact Council's corporate greenhouse gas emissions. Estimates of the magnitude of each improvement are provided where supporting data is available. The overall extent of the improvements are summarised at the end of this section. Some actions are presented without estimates as this information will only become known further into the project or at project completion. Any data presented relates to Council's emissions detailed on Page 6 and not those of the Shire. Commitment to any project will be subject to a cost/benefit analysis

## Switch to renewable electricity supply

Electricity consumption is responsible for 34% of Council's current GHG emissions (this includes street lighting). Moving away from coal-fired supply to renewables has an immediate and ongoing effect to our environmental footprint. A project to facilitate this is currently underway and the type of instrument being used is termed a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA). This will be implemented in stages, commencing in 2022.

## Introduce a food and garden organics kerbside bin collection service

Waste sent to landfill is the single largest contributor to Council's GHG emissions, representing 45% of the total. Food organics and garden organics (FOGO) constitute over half of what goes into our weekly kerbside mixed waste (i.e. red lidded) bins. Council is working on introducing a FOGO service that will not only divert this waste away from landfill but will also contribute to the circular economy by being turned into compost. It is estimated that Council's

GHG emissions will reduce by 6% as a result of this project. Planning is currently underway, with an introduction of this service planned for the second half of 2022.

## Emissions Reduction Masterplan

An Emissions Reduction Masterplan (ERM) was prepared by an independent body subsequent to the preparation of Council's corporate greenhouse gas inventory. It encompasses a review of Council's large electricity consuming sites and proposes a number of projects aimed at reducing consumption. The Masterplan has estimated that a reduction of up to 25% from Council's current electricity consumption can be achieved. This represents a GHG emissions reduction of up to 8%. Council will review each project proposal during 2021/2022.

## Climate Change Risk Assessment

Council will engage a suitable party to assist with developing a climate change risk assessment, using Council's Risk Management Framework. This exercise reviews Council's activities and reports on the various risks that climate change represents, to be included in Council's enterprise risk register. It is a wide-ranging review as is warranted by the varied services provided by Council and deals with questions such as: Will our roads be affected being subjected to higher average temperatures, what are the potential impacts to our water supply, will our community spaces offer respite from more inclement weather, what are the impacts on biodiversity of the region.

## Sustainability Hub

Council has begun a review into establishing a Sustainability Hub. This space will act as a teaching and community education and learning centre for environmental and social wellbeing topics, including but not limited to: gardening, being water-wise, solar installations, worm farming and composting, social

inclusion, recycling/re-use/repair and dealing with adverse weather. An investigation into possible sites is currently underway.

## Native Nursery

Council will investigate establishing or supporting a native nursery. Such a facility could not only service the needs of Council, but programs encouraging planting of native flora by the community can also be supported. An investigation into possible sites is currently underway.

## Schools and Community Education

Council regularly facilitates educational programs. Historically these have predominantly concerned environmental topics. These will continue to be supported, with the topic of climate change included where possible.

## Greenhouse Gas Offsets

Council will review potential sources of greenhouse gas offsets as part of the target of achieving carbon neutrality by 2030. Some level of offsets will be required to reach this goal. This review has been initiated.

## Data Capture and Reporting

In order to track progress against emissions reduction goals we must ensure that our measuring and monitoring practices are efficient and effective. Work is currently underway to improve current methods.

## Sustainability Policy

Council has displayed leadership in the fight against climate change through its Climate Emergency declaration and target of becoming carbon neutral by 2030. The desire to operate in a more sustainable manner is declared and committed to through a recently adopted Sustainability Policy. This over-arching document is used to help drive change within Council operations. This Policy has been prepared and adopted by Council.



### Update procurement policies to improve sustainability measures

One way that Council can influence the climate change efforts of other organisations is through its policies and procedures relating to procurement. Council will conduct a review of its procurement processes to benchmark against current best practice. This project has been initiated and is planned for completion in 2022.

### Revise Passenger and Light Vehicle Policy

Hybrid and fully electric vehicles are increasingly available and viable in the Australian market. Council will review its passenger and light vehicle purchasing practices to place preference on hybrid or electric vehicles where they are considered fit for purpose. This Policy review is planned for completion in 2022.

### Provide Hybrid and Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure

Council will install charging infrastructure at Administration Centres and Depots for Council vehicles. The timing of this

infrastructure is pending the review of the Passenger and Light Vehicle Policy. To date, Council has facilitated the installation of an NRMA charging station for public use at Scone. Any installations of such type will consider opportunities to provide public access.

### Investigate Alternate Fuels for Heavy Vehicles

Diesel used to power UHSC's heavy vehicle and utility fleet is responsible for 15% of Council's GHG emissions. A study will be undertaken that investigates possible alternate fuel use (e.g. Biodiesel and hydrogen). This study has begun and is ongoing, as alternatives become available.





## Upgrade Street Lighting to LEDs

LED lighting represents an improvement over older technologies as not only do they consume less electricity but they also require less maintenance. Council and its service providers Essential Energy and Ausgrid are part-way through a program of street lighting LED upgrades. The program is expected to be completed by the end of 2021.

## Upgrade Lighting at Council Buildings to LEDs

Council will progressively change to LED lighting as existing lights are due for replacement. Council will also seek to bring forward such changes where economies of scale help support the case (e.g. in buildings with large numbers of lights). A review of council buildings has begun.

## Investigate Potential Council Renewable Energy Projects

A review is currently underway of existing Council owned sites where renewable energy installations could be housed. This review is planned for completion in 2022.

## Review Upper Hunter Local Environmental Plan 2013 (LEP)

The LEP will be reviewed to ensure appropriate consideration is given to sustainability outcomes. This will be carried out in 2021/2022.

## Review Upper Hunter Development Control Plan (DCP)

The DCP is being reviewed to ensure it provides appropriate support. This will be completed in 2021.

## Review Emergency Management Plan

Given the increased likelihood of extreme weather events Council will review its Emergency Management Plan. This will be carried out in 2022.

## Review Asset Management Plans

Council will review its Asset Management Plans with a view to ensuring adequate sustainability measures are considered. This will be carried out in 2022/2023

## Host Industry Forum

Council will host an industry forum aimed at promoting collaboration between local industries on environmental matters. Topics will include waste management, energy use and procurement. This forum will be conducted in 2022/2023.

## Host Emergency Services Forum

Council will host an emergency services forum aimed at discussing the potential impacts of climate change to local emergency service providers. It is intended that such a forum will facilitate idea sharing between the various groups on how to prepare for and deal with climate change outcomes. This forum will be conducted in 2022/2023.

## Review Position Description Template

Council will review the Position Description template to ensure sustainable practices form part of staff job requirements where appropriate. It is planned for this review to be completed in 2022/2023.



**During the recent drought, Murrurundi was subject to level 6 water restrictions for 2 years.**





### Prepare Drought Response Management Plan

Council is currently preparing a Drought Response Management Plan in conjunction with Singleton Council and Muswellbrook Council. This document will be released in 2022.

### Consider Permanent Water Restrictions for Shire

Council is currently considering the option of implementing permanent water restrictions or usage guidelines as a means to reduce consumption and hence provide improved water security. A decision is due by the end of 2021.

### Review Irrigation of Council Assets

Council will conduct a review into current irrigation practices with the aim of determining whether more efficient methods are available. This review will take place in 2022.

### Strategic Water Planning

Council is currently working with the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment on preparing an

up to date Integrated Water Cycle Management Plan. This is a long-term view that encompasses raw water supply as well as sewerage and stormwater services.

### Pursue Upgrades to Shire Water Treatment

A project is currently underway that will see the main water supply treatment upgraded to include Ultra Violet Disinfection as well as Chlorination. In line with the recently published Drinking Water Management Plan, funding and support will continue to be sought from relevant parties to provide further treatment upgrades. This will provide more options around raw water sourcing and hence improve continuity and quality of water supply.

### Conduct a potable water network integrity study

Council will conduct an exercise that will review the potable water supply network and attempt to determine sources of losses. This will be conducted in 2022/2023.

### Review use of rainwater tanks on Council buildings

Council will conduct an exercise of reviewing each facility to determine the suitability of installing rainwater tanks, to reduce the burden on potable water supply. This project will also review rainwater usage at sites with pre-existing rainwater tanks to determine if capture is in excess of local requirements and if so whether alternate uses can be found. This review will be conducted in 2022.

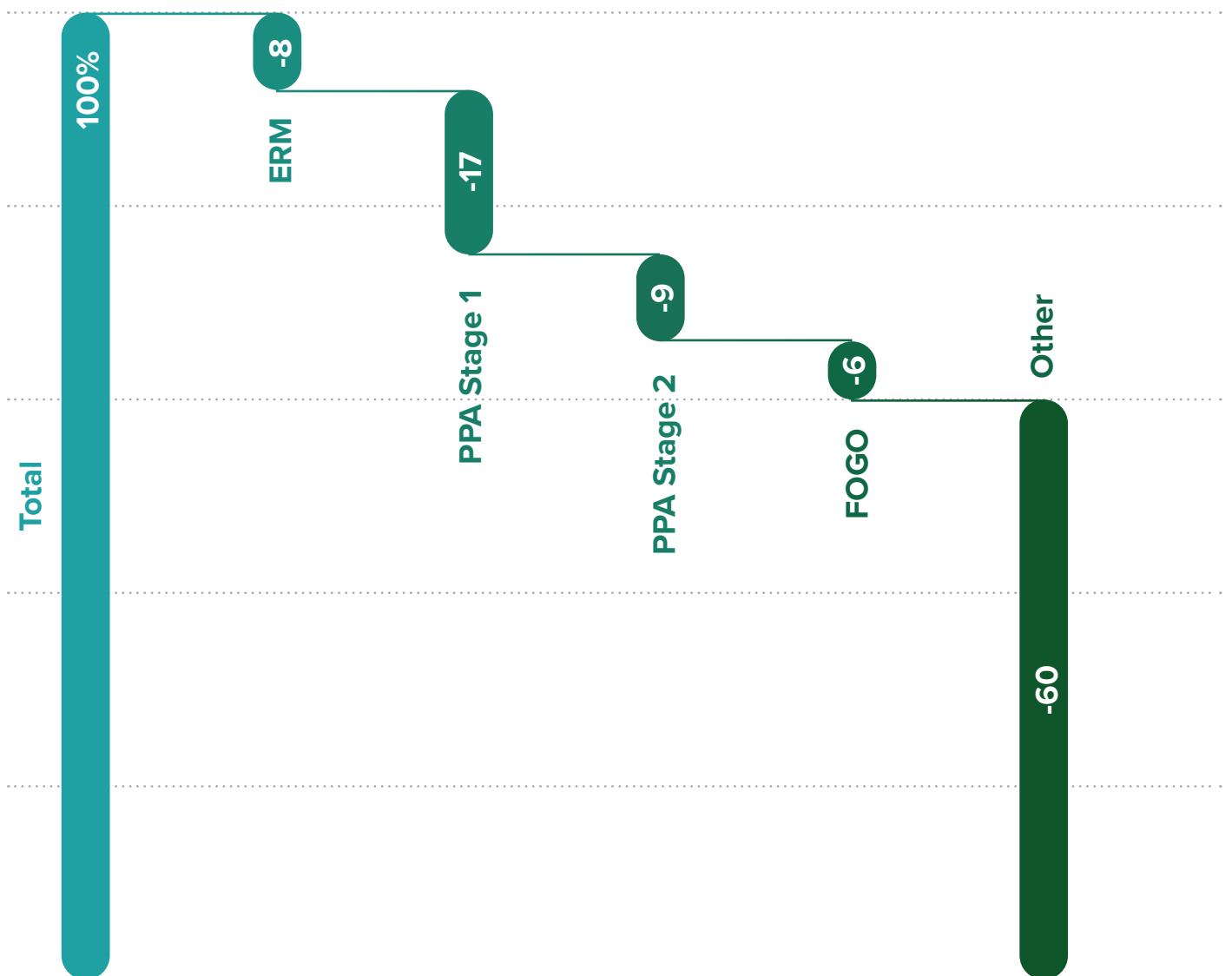
### Project Design & Management Review

A review of Council's project design and management practices will be conducted to ensure appropriate sustainability principles are incorporated. This review will be completed in 2022.

### Tree Planting Program

Council will conduct a review of public spaces to determine opportunities for increased planting of flora, particularly native trees. This will not only serve to provide increased shaded areas, but also encourage wildlife and provide carbon offsets. This review will be completed in 2022/2023.

The following chart shows emissions reductions achievable by project. The “Other” section will be made up of smaller contributing mitigation projects, plus carbon offset projects.



### Reporting

Council will produce an annual report on the progress of this Strategy and Action Plan. This will include the status of each project as well as including any new initiatives or relevant information.



**Questions?**

## **Contact Council**

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