

Council Policy

CLIMATE CHANGE RESPONSE POLICY

1. OBJECTIVE

The key objective of this Policy is to articulate Council's position and response to climate change. It demonstrates Council's commitment to respond to climate change through meaningful actions that reduce Council's greenhouse gas emissions; facilitate and support an LGA-wide reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the projected impacts of climate change both for Council and the community.

In implementing this policy, Council's objectives are to:

- Provide timely, up-to-date, scientifically-sound information to Council and the community on climate change in order to create a holistic and well-informed response to climate change.
- Develop and implement appropriate mitigation actions in response to climate change to achieve organisational greenhouse gas emissions reduction (net zero) targets set in consultation with the community.
- Work with the community to develop and implement appropriate mitigation actions in response to climate change that reduce the community's greenhouse gas emissions in line with agreed net zero targets.
- Identify, assess, prioritise and manage the organisation's risks from climate change and support adaptation and resilience strategies for the Port Macquarie-Hastings community.
- Ensure that climate change adaptation is a core component of planning for a resilient and thriving Port Macquarie-Hastings LGA and is embedded across Council's functions and activities including (but not limited to) biodiversity conservation, long-term financial planning, asset management, infrastructure delivery, land use planning, economic development, disaster management and support of our communities as a result of changes brought about by climate change.
- Comply with applicable legal requirements and implement State and Federal government policies, guidelines and/or directives related to climate change where required or relevant.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

Local government has a significant role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to the impacts of climate change. The effects of climate change have the potential to impact our natural environment, damage Council assets, cause serious disruptions to the delivery of Council services, generate unbudgeted financial impacts and affect the wellbeing of our local community and others further afield.

Council:

- Acknowledges the evidence-based science for climate change and the serious threat that climate change poses to our current and future way of life and the Earth's ecosystems, including impacts on health, safety, economic security and quality of life.
- Has recognised and declared that we are now in a state of global climate emergency.
- Acknowledges that declaring a climate emergency needs to be supported with strong policy and the supporting commitment and actions to implement it with substance.
- Acknowledges that a successful response to climate change requires immediate and ongoing collaborative action and shared responsibility by all levels of government, industry, business, communities and individuals.
- Acknowledges that it is part of Council's role to:

- a. reduce its organisational contributions to climate change by reducing its operational greenhouse gas emissions;
 - b. identify, plan for and adapt to the risks and impacts of climate change to its operations;
 - c. support and facilitate the advancement of climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resilience for our community;
 - d. advocate for strong leadership, action and resourcing from all levels of government to ensure an effective response to climate change
- Confirms that Council's response to climate change is an essential element of Council's overall approach and commitment to sustainability.
- Acknowledges Council's response to climate change and sustainability needs to be locally focussed and holistic, requiring a structured and co-ordinated approach across all Council functions.
- Will apply resources to implement the Policy through the preparation and implementation of relevant strategies and plans. Progress towards targets will be delivered through the Integrated Planning & Reporting Framework.

Council will adopt the following principles in its response to climate change:

1. Precautionary Principle

Council will apply the precautionary principle to climate change adaptation and greenhouse gas emissions reduction in order to mitigate threats of serious or permanent harm to the environment or our community. Council will do this by taking account of all available evidence to reduce risk to Council and the community and avoid using uncertainty as a justification for not addressing risks adequately or in a timely manner. We will develop and implement short and long term actions that seek to achieve resilience and a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions while also delivering other social, economic and environmental benefits.

2. Evidence-based Decision-making

Council will base its decision making regarding climate change responses on internationally recognised scientific data and continually review its understanding of the risks and impacts of climate change to Council operations and the community. Where reliably available, Council will also seek to utilise climate change projections specific to the Port Macquarie-Hastings region. Where possible, Council will use climate change projections that are consistent with those used or referenced by the NSW Government for use in Council's hazard or risk determinations. In the absence of these, Council will seek to apply factors contained in projections provided by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO).

3. Adaptive and Integrated Management Response

The implementation of this Policy will primarily be through the Climate Change Response Strategy and associated Action Plans. Additionally, Council will regularly review its policies, strategies, plans and other relevant systems, where their content may be affected by climate change, to ensure that climate change response is integrated across the organisation. Council will ensure that its actions, decisions and policy response to climate change remain current as the science of climate change develops, and that they reflect Council's financial and operational capacity.

4. Collaborative and Capacity-building Approach

Council will work collaboratively with community, agencies, industry, businesses, and all levels of government to build knowledge, develop partnerships, seek and advocate for local, regional, state, and national climate change mitigation and adaptation solutions that are informed by the current knowledge and best available science. Council will build the adaptive capacity and the resilience of Council and its community through active engagement, transparent and proactive communication and education regarding emissions reduction measures and the identification and management of climate-related risks

5. Risk Mitigation & Management

Council will take account of all available evidence to understand and prepare for climate change related risk to Council and the community. We will ensure that climate change factors are integrated into our risk assessment framework.

3. SCOPE

This is a whole-of-Council Policy. It applies to all Councillors, Council staff, contractors and others that act on Council's behalf to ensure they work in accordance with the Policy principles.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES AND AUTHORITIES

| Position | Responsibility |
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| Councillors | Responsible for understanding and applying the Climate Change Response Policy in setting strategy and decision-making. |
| CEO & Senior Leadership Team | The CEO, Directors and Group Managers are responsible for advocating, supporting and embedding the implementation of the Climate Change Response Policy. |
| Group Manager, Strategy | Responsible for the development and review of the Climate Change Response Policy. |
| Group Manager, Environment & Regulatory Services | Responsible for the implementation of this Policy across Council. |
| Group Manager, Customer Experience & Communications & Group Manager, Community | Responsible for: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Providing the community with clear and consistent messaging about climate change and Council's response to climate change• Providing education programs and materials to support the community to take action in response to climate change |
| Sustainability Coordinator | Responsible for: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Providing technical support and expertise to assist in the implementation of this Policy.• Providing regular reporting and analysis to Council and the community.• Educating and liaising with key areas of Council's operations e.g. procurement, maintenance operations and infrastructure, and community engagement to lead the inclusion of appropriate climate change response actions in their area of responsibility |
| All Port Macquarie-Hastings Council Employees | Responsible for applying this Policy in planning, decision-making activities and reporting where required. |

5. POLICY CONTEXT & REFERENCES

Council Strategic Alignment:

Council's activities and operations are guided and directed by State and Federal Government policy. The Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) framework provides the broader strategic direction for Council to develop the Community Strategic Plan (CSP) and Local Strategic Planning Statement (LSPS). These Plans translate the community's future goals, aspirations, and strategic land use planning priorities into the key outcomes that the Council, other agencies, and the community will be working to achieve. A strong and recurring theme in these strategic documents is the health and preservation of our natural environment.

This Policy aligns with:

- the Community's Vision for Port Macquarie-Hastings as defined in the **Towards 2030 Community Strategic Plan** - *"A sustainable high-quality of life for all"*
- Council's **Local Strategic Planning Statement "Shaping Our Future 2040"** which guides land use planning for the Port Macquarie-Hastings LGA to 2040, identifies Planning Priority 3 - *"Increase our*

community's resilience by identifying, mitigating and adapting to the impacts and risks of natural hazards, social and environmental change."

This Policy is also consistent with Council's overarching commitment to a quadruple-bottom line (QBL) approach to sustainability, as outlined in Council's Sustainability Framework. This Framework commits Council to the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals with Goal 13 being Climate Action (see below).

International & National Context

- In 2015, at the twenty first Convention of Parties (COP21) 195 countries agreed on the United Nations **Paris Agreement** on climate change. The key objective was to limit the increase in global temperatures to well below 2 degrees and pursue efforts to limit the rise to 1.5 degrees. The commitment was to achieve net-zero emissions globally by 2050.
- The **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change** (IPCC) is the leading world body for assessing the science related to climate change, its impacts and potential future risks, and possible response options.
As part of the decision to adopt the Paris Agreement the IPCC produced a Special Report in 2018 on global warming of 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways. The IPCC reported that the current global commitments may not be enough to reach the 1.5 °C goal. The report indicates that prospects of succeeding will require emissions to reduce rapidly in the short term, and adaptation measures at all levels including resilience through technology, as well as changing behaviour and policy.
- **The UNESCO Declaration on Ethical Principles in Relation to Climate Change (2017)**
This Declaration expresses the concern of UNESCO Member States that climate change could create morally unacceptable damage and injustice. The Declaration sets out a shortlist of the globally-agreed ethical principles that should guide decision-making and policy-making at all levels and help mobilise people to address climate change. The six principles are as follows:
 - Prevention of harm
 - Precautionary approach
 - Equity and justice
 - Sustainable development
 - Solidarity
 - Scientific knowledge and integrity in decision-making
- In 2015 all United Nations (UN) Member States including Australia, adopted The **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). The SDG's are an urgent call for action for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. The SDG's are a globally accepted framework for sustainable development that recognise the co-dependence of society, the economy and the environment. The goals include strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and promote economic growth while developing ways to manage climate change. The link between sustainable development and limiting global warming to the 1.5 °C goal by 2050 is recognised by the goal 13 for climate action (SDG 13).
- In 2015, Australia pledged to the Paris Agreement and adopted the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The Australian government has committed to a staged emissions reduction approach with a target of 26–28% reduction of emissions below 2005 levels by 2030. This target will be reviewed within the first period of the policy. Australia has yet to set a 2050 target.
- In 2016, the NSW Government endorsed the Paris Agreement and took action consistent with the level of effort to achieve Australia's commitment to the Paris Agreement through implementation of the **NSW Climate Change Policy Framework**. The current aspirational objectives of NSW are to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. The NSW Stage 1 Plan sets out a staged approach of a 35% reduction in emissions compared to 2005 levels by 2030.

- In 2016, the NSW Government's **North Coast Regional Plan 2036** set a goal for the region to be "The most stunning environment in NSW". Direction 3 of the Regional Plan requires "*management of natural hazards and climate change*".
- In 2020 the **Local Government of NSW's Climate Change Position Statement** detailed how local government had a significant role in reducing carbon emissions and adapting to the impacts of climate change. Reasoning that "the effects of climate change have the potential to damage council assets, cause serious disruptions to the delivery of council services, generate unbudgeted financial impacts and affect the wellbeing of the community".
- The **Sharma v Minister for the Environment [2021]** judgement in which it was held that the Federal Minister is required to consider recognised principles of environmental law, such as Ecologically Sustainable Development and the Precautionary Principle when making decisions under the EPBC Act. The judgement included the consideration that the Minister has responsibility for the environment and the interests of Australians, and must ensure a healthy environment for the benefit of future generations. The decision in Sharma is the first time in the world that a government executive in their decision making has been held to owe a duty of care to young people to prevent them from harms associated with climate change.
- The **Bushfire Survivors for Climate Action Incorporated vs NSW Environment Protection Authority [2021]** judgement in which the Land and Environment Court of NSW ordered the NSW Environment Protection Authority to develop environmental quality objectives, guidelines and policies to ensure environment protection from climate change.

6. DEFINITIONS

| TERM | DEFINITION |
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| Climate Adaptation | The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) defines climate adaptation as the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate change and its effects. |
| Climate Change | In the context of this Policy refers to anthropogenic climate change which means a change of climate over an extended period, typically decades or longer, which is caused by human activity and has direct and indirect impacts on the environment, community and Council business. |
| Climate Mitigation | The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) defines climate mitigation as human intervention to reduce the sources or enhance the sinks of greenhouse gases. |
| Climate Resilience | Means building capacity to cope with climate change, to recover from the impacts of these climatic changes and to adapt using a combination of sustainable adaptation and mitigation measures. |
| Council | Means Port Macquarie-Hastings Council, being the organisation responsible for the administration of Council affairs and operations, and the implementation of Council policy and strategies. |
| Hazard | Means the potential occurrence of a natural or human-induced event, trend or impact that may cause damage, including loss to property, infrastructure, livelihoods, service provision, and ecosystems. |
| Integrated Planning & Reporting (IP&R) Framework | The IP&R Framework describes the suite of integrated plans that set out a vision, goals and strategic actions to achieve them. It involves a reporting structure to communicate progress to Council and the community as well as a structured timeline for review to ensure the goals and actions are still relevant. |
| Net Zero Emissions | Net zero emissions refers to achieving an overall balance between greenhouse gas emissions produced and greenhouse gas emissions taken out of the atmosphere |
| Precautionary Approach | Where that where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage to the environment or the community, we do not postpone measures to prevent environmental degradation due to a lack of full scientific certainty. |

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| Resilience | Means the capacity of social, economic, and environmental systems to cope with a hazardous event, trend, or disturbance, responding or reorganising in ways that maintain their essential function, identity, and structure, while also maintaining the capacity for adaptation, learning, and transformation. |
| Risk | Means the potential for consequences where something of value is at stake and where the outcome is uncertain, recognising the diversity of values. Risk is often represented as probability of occurrence of hazardous events (likelihood) or trends multiplied by the impacts (or consequences) if these events or trends occur. |
| Sustainability | Sustainability describes managing resources future generations. It is a commitment to live within the carrying capacity and resource limits of the planet. This concept goes beyond environmental sustainability, which concerns earth's natural resources, to include economic and social sustainability, which relate to meeting people's current social and economic needs without compromising future generations. |

7. PROCESS OWNER

Group Manager - Environment & Regulatory Services

8. AMENDMENTS

This is a new policy.