

Bellinghen Shire Climate Emergency Program 2020 – 2030



Climate Emergency Response Framework

'Climate Emergency Is the Fight of Our Lives, for Our Lives'

António Guterres, UN Secretary-General
2019 Climate Action Summit, New York



Bellingham School Strikes for Climate March and October 2019. Photographs: Janene Carey/Shawn Hammond

This document sets out the framework by which Bellingen Council commits to acting on the climate emergency and supporting the community to act.

On 27th March 2019, at the ordinary meeting of council, Bellingen Shire formally declared a climate emergency. The declaration is appended to this framework and serves as a call to take urgent action in rapidly reducing our carbon emissions across all of society, both locally and globally. Whilst the emergency is alarming there are many things we can do in our fight against irreparable climate breakdown.

Bellingen Shire is part of a rapidly growing global movement that started in 2016 when Darebin Council in Victoria became the first government body in the world to declare a climate emergency. As of 8th November 2019, 1183 jurisdictions in 23 countries have declared a climate emergency. Populations covered by jurisdictions that have declared a climate emergency amount to 290million citizens. In Australia 71 jurisdictions representing roughly 6.67million people and 26.5% of the population have declared a climate emergency, including 28 in New South Wales and the governments of the Australian Capital Territory and South Australia¹.

This framework outlines how Council will work with the community to act on the climate emergency in as fast and effective a way as possible.

What is the climate emergency?

Climate emergency can be understood in two ways:

1. The climate emergency **situation**
2. The climate emergency **response**

Climate Emergency Situation

The climate emergency **situation** refers to catastrophic changes to the world's climate caused by human activity and resulting in a loss of a safe climate, which threatens all life in earth. This aspect of the climate emergency is extensively documented. We know that the earth is warming at an increasing rate and as a result we face serious consequences for weather systems, food production and for all people and species²

We are all aware of the unfolding global climate emergency. Global climate change has already had observable effects on the environment. Glaciers have shrunk, ice on rivers and lakes is breaking up earlier, plant and animal ranges have shifted, trees are flowering sooner. Effects that scientists had predicted in the past would result from global climate change are now occurring including loss of sea ice, accelerated sea level rise and longer, more intense heat waves. Some of the key global aspects of climate change to be aware of are:

¹ <https://www.cedamia.org/global/> Accessed 8/11/2019

² Darebin Council Framework for Effective Local Government Climate Emergency Response

- We have already locked in a level of damage (climate impact) which will continue through this century and beyond. We can do nothing about this but will need to adapt to it. We can however try and limit further damage.
- Temperatures will continue to rise but they will not be uniform or smooth across the globe.
- Sea levels will continue to rise for centuries at rates equal to or higher than those of the current century³

Australia is already experiencing significant climate impacts including unprecedented heat, bushfires, flooding and drought events. These impacts will only worsen and become more frequent over time. Many in our communities are particularly vulnerable, including our oldest and youngest residents, those with medical conditions, low-income households and the homeless. Many of our farmers, who provide the food we eat, are already in a dire situation with the current drought, followed now by catastrophic bush fires across NSW and Queensland.

The Facts - Global

The American Meteorological Society's *State of the Climate in 2018*⁴ released in August 2019 and NASA⁵ state:

- During 2018, global carbon dioxide concentrations rose to a record 407.4 parts per million (ppm). That is "the highest in the modern instrumental record and in ice core records dating back 800,000 years"
- 2018 was the fourth-warmest year on record. The three other warmest years were 2015, 2016 and 2017, with 2016 as the warmest year since records first began being kept in the mid-1800s.
- Sea levels rose to record levels for a seventh consecutive year. They have risen over 20cm since 1880 (when reliable records began) and are predicted to rise a further 122cm by 2100. They will continue to rise for centuries.
- Glaciers continued to melt at a concerning rate for the 30th straight year.

NOAA⁶ reports that atmospheric carbon dioxide continued its rapid rise in 2019, with the average for May peaking at 414.7 parts per million (ppm). That's not only the highest seasonal peak recorded in 61 years of observations on top of Hawaii's largest volcano, but also the highest level in human history and higher than at any point in millions of years.

The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) models shows that Earth will warm between 2°C and 6°C over this century to 2100, depending on how fast carbon emissions

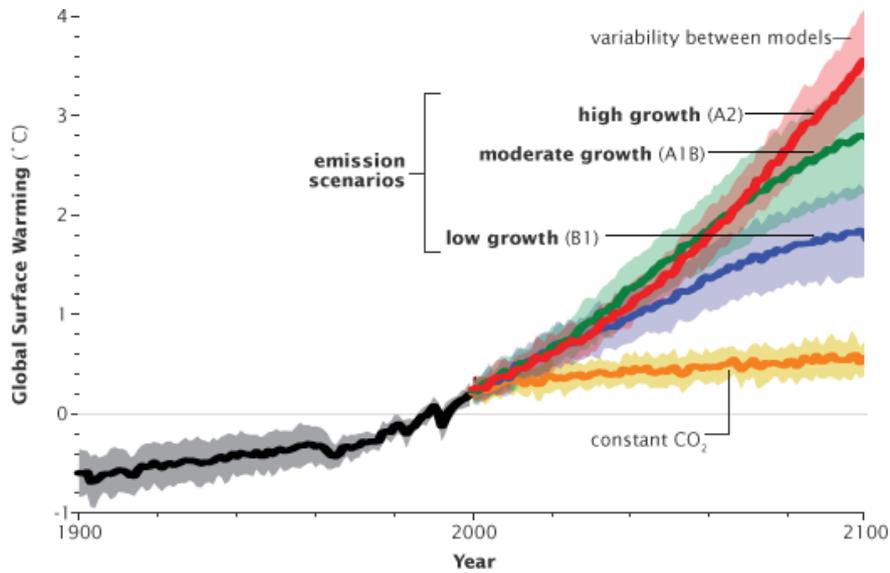
³ <https://climate.nasa.gov/effects/> Accessed 20/08/2019

⁴ <https://www.ametsoc.org/index.cfm/ams/publications/bulletin-of-the-american-meteorological-society-bams/state-of-the-climate/> Accessed 20/08/2019

⁵ <https://climate.nasa.gov/effects/> Accessed 20/08/2019

⁶ <https://research.noaa.gov/article/ArtMID/587/ArticleID/2461/Carbon-dioxide-levels-hit-record-peak-in-May> Accessed 19/09/2019

grow.⁷ The IPCC identifies (with high confidence) that human-induced warming reached 1°C above pre-industrial levels in 2017, increasing at 0.2°C per decade⁸.



Model simulations by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimate that Earth will warm between two and six degrees Celsius over the next century, depending on how fast carbon dioxide emissions grow. Scenarios that assume that people will burn more and more fossil fuel provide the estimates in the top end of the temperature range, while scenarios that assume that greenhouse gas emissions will grow slowly give lower temperature predictions. The orange line provides an estimate of global temperatures if greenhouse gases stayed at year 2000 levels. (©2007 [IPCC](#) WG1 AR-4.)

The Facts - Australia

Australia’s summer mean temperature is rising steeply. In what the Climate Council called the “angriest summer”, last summer (2018/19) saw extreme weather records tumbling, with Australia experiencing its hottest summer on record. It was characterised by prolonged continent-wide heatwaves and record hot days, bushfires throughout Australia and heavy rainfall and flooding in Northern Queensland. In just 90 days 206 records were broken around the country. January was the hottest on record for all the states apart from Western Australia and South Australia.

In just 90 days last summer 206 records were broken around the country.

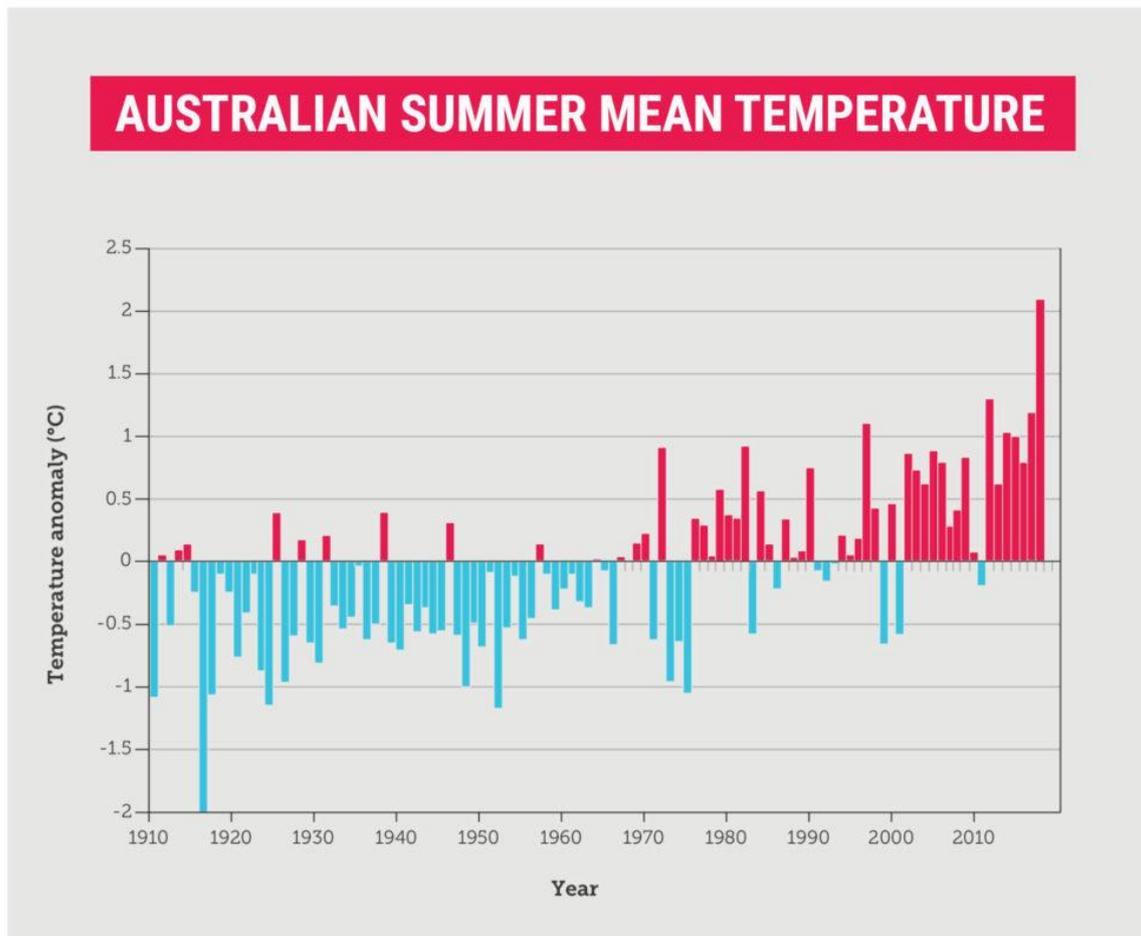
In NSW in 2018/19, we had the hottest summer on record (3.41°C above average) with Bourke experiencing 21 consecutive days above 40°C.

The CSIRO states that Australia will experience continued increases in heatwaves, increased sea level rise and ocean acidification, decreases in rainfall across the south and an increase in intense heavy rainfall throughout the country.⁹

⁷ <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/features/GlobalWarming/page5.php> Accessed 20/08/2019

⁸ <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/> Accessed 18/09/2019

Many parts of Australia are in the grip of the worst drought ever. The Bureau of Meteorology reports that the 32 months from January 2017 to August 2019 has been the driest on record averaged over the Murray–Darling Basin (34% below the 1961–1990 average), as well as over the northern Murray–Darling Basin (40% below average) and for the state of New South Wales (34% below average)¹⁰.



Summer temperatures have been rising steeply in Australia over recent decades. Source: BoM (2019a).

⁹ <https://www.csiro.au/en/Research/OandA/Areas/Assessing-our-climate/State-of-the-Climate-2018/Report-at-a-glance>
Accessed 20/08/2019

¹⁰ <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/drought/> Accessed 18/09/2019

The Facts - North Coast of NSW

In Bellingen we have increasingly seen summer (and even spring) temperatures rising to over 40°C, have had unseasonably warm winters and as of 11th September 2019 Bellingen Shire is on Level 3 (Very High) water restrictions due to ongoing low rainfall in the catchment area.

On November 10th, 2019 the NSW state government declared a State of Emergency under Section 33 of the State of Emergency and Rescue Management Act due to catastrophic bush fires across the region, the ferocity and extent of which has never been seen before.

Our Northern Tablelands neighbours are suffering an ongoing, record-breaking drought with the 31 months from January 2017 to July 2019 being the driest on record for the region¹¹, receiving 38% below average rainfall. During the cool months from April 2019 to July 2019 the region received 50% below the average rainfall. The towns in the area are rapidly running out of water. Guyra is currently on Level 5-Emergency water restrictions with water being trucked from Armidale and Armidale itself is on Level 4 restrictions.

The North Coast of NSW is forecast to have an average temperature increase of 0.7°C in the near future (2020-2039) and 2.1°C in the far future (2060-2079)¹². This is like the temperature increases predicted for other regions and is outside the maximum “safe” limit of 1.5°C identified in the IPCC special report in March 2018.

Unfortunately, we are in uncharted territory this afternoon -- we've never seen this many fires concurrently at emergency warning level

Shane Fitzsimmons, NSW Rural Fire Service Commissioner, 8 November 2019

¹¹ <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/drought/> Accessed 14/08/2019

¹² <https://climatechange.environment.nsw.gov.au/Climate-projections-for-NSW/Climate-projections-for-your-region/North-Coast-Climate-Change-Downloads> Accessed 18/09/2019

Figure 1: NSW north coast projected changes (near future 2020 - 2039, far future 2060 - 2079)

Projected temperature changes	
 Maximum temperatures are projected to increase in the near future by 0.4 – 1.0°C	Maximum temperatures are projected to increase in the far future by 1.5 – 2.4°C
 Minimum temperatures are projected to increase in the near future by 0.5 – 1.0°C	Minimum temperatures are projected to increase in the far future by 1.6 – 2.5°C
 The number of hot days will increase	The number of cold nights will decrease
Projected rainfall changes	
 Rainfall is projected to decrease in winter	Rainfall is projected to increase in autumn and spring
Projected Forest Fire Danger Index (FFDI) changes	
 Average fire weather is projected to increase in summer and spring	Severe fire weather days are projected to increase in summer and spring

These statistics continue a trend of worsening extreme weather events. These events will continue to increase in severity and frequency leading to a climate catastrophe unless we act fast.

Likely local impacts of not acting include^{13 14}:

- Increased costs of food, utilities, fuel and insurance
- Increasing poor health and deaths resulting from severe weather, heat and diseases
- Increasing levels of damage to homes, roads, power and water supplies from severe weather events, increased bushfires and rising sea levels
- Strained emergency services and community support services
- Reduced water supply and more frequent and stringent water restrictions affecting households, agriculture, parks and wildlife
- Species and ecosystem loss and extinction, with their associated functions and services
- Local economic and organisational impacts of lost productivity due to extreme weather, making outdoor and other work impractical for large parts of the year.

All of the above impacts are occurring in our Shire right now.

¹³ Darebin Climate Emergency Plan 2017-2022

¹⁴ <https://climatechange.environment.nsw.gov.au/Impacts-of-climate-change> Accessed 20/08/2019

Climate Emergency Response

The climate emergency **response** refers to a specific approach to tackling climate change, seeking to mobilise and act at a **scale** and **speed** that will restore a safe climate, with the least possible loss and damage during the transition back to a safe climate.¹⁵

A safe climate is considered to be one where the temperature increase remains below 1.5°C.

The target is to provide **maximum protection for all species and all people** across the globe.

Almost 200 countries signed the Paris Agreement in 2015, which included the target of limiting global temperatures to 'well below 2°C and pursue efforts to below 1.5°C'. However, the IPCC Special Report (March 2018) warns governments of the stark difference of a 2°C warmer world compared with 1.5°C¹⁶. It states that to keep global warming below 1.5°C we need to reduce carbon emissions by at least 45% by 2030 (based on 2010 levels) and then rapidly drop to zero by 2050 at the latest.

The report goes on to say that *this will require rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society, including energy, land, urban and infrastructure (including transport and buildings). 'Business as usual' and incremental or gradual improvements will not be enough.*

In order to stop warming and create global cooling we will need to:

1. Reduce carbon emissions to zero quickly
2. Reduce short lived pollutants such as methane and hydrofluorocarbons as much as possible
3. Draw down the excess carbon dioxide already in the atmosphere

The obstacles to action are not technological but psychological and political. *What is required is a psychological shift into emergency mode.*

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹⁷ comprise of 17 global goals for achieving a sustainable planet. Any actions or decisions made concerning the climate emergency and climate change must be made in the context of these goals. For example, any action around climate change should also consider outcomes or impacts on other goals such as inequality reduction or no poverty.

¹⁵ Darebin Council Framework for Effective Local Government Climate Emergency Response

¹⁶ <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/> Accessed 18/09/2019

¹⁷ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>

A recent report (November 2019) identifies the co-benefits of linking the implementation of the SDGs and climate action¹⁸. For example, speeding up the energy transition (SDG 7) and more sustainably managing forests and other terrestrial ecosystems (SDG 15) would directly and positively affect greenhouse gas emissions. Similarly, sustainable industrialization (SDG 9), sustainable food production systems and resilient agricultural practices (SDG 2) and responsible consumption and production (SDG 12) contribute to low emission pathways and sustainable development.

In addition, limiting global temperature increase to well below 1.5 degrees Celsius would be beneficial to the SDGs related to resilience and disaster risk reduction, such as poverty (SDG 1), infrastructure (SDG 9) and urban settlement (SDG 11).

Therefore in the development of its climate emergency plans, Council will use the UN SDGs as a guiding set of principles.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

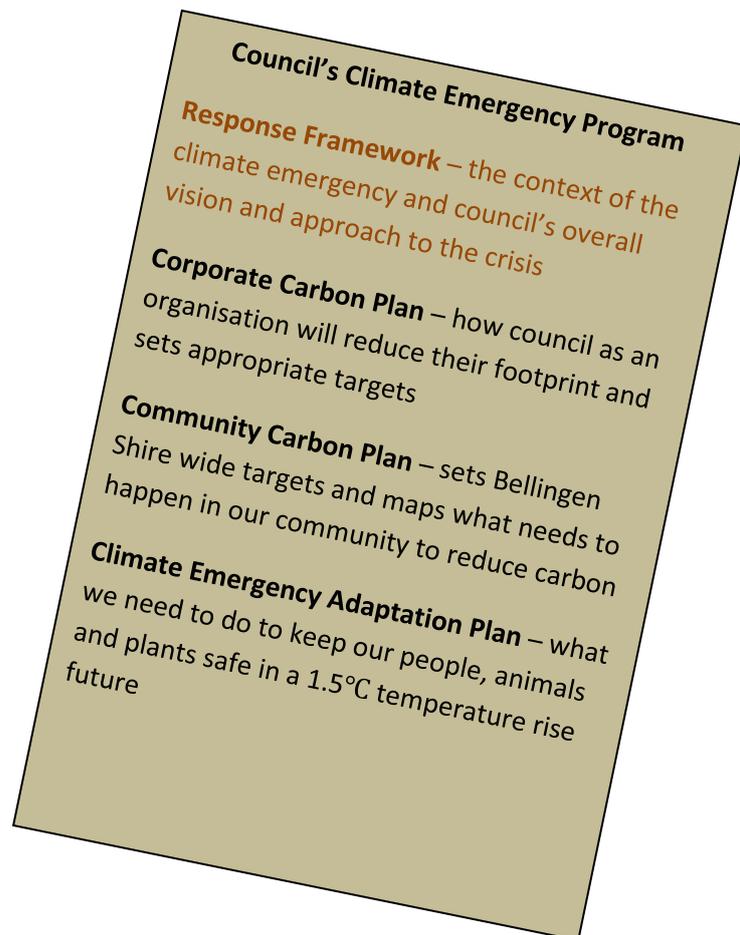


¹⁸ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/climate-sdgs-synergies2019> Accessed 13 November 2019

How will Bellingen Council respond?

In order to address the climate emergency we need to rapidly decarbonise the planet. This means fundamental changes in the way we do things, the actions we take and the choices we make. It covers every aspect of our daily lives from what we buy, our houses, our vehicles, our schools, our businesses and economy and of course our energy use. Business as usual is no longer an option. The changes will need to be transformational in nature and gives us the opportunity to live in a more sustainable and climate aware manner.

Bellingen Council will act on the climate emergency in several ways¹⁹.



1. *Taking leadership* – we have taken step one by declaring a climate emergency.
2. *Getting our own house in order* - we will embed climate emergency action in all council strategies, plans and actions. We will develop a Carbon Plan for council's operations outlining how we will rapidly decarbonise our operations.
3. *Mobilising the community* - we will support the community to take action. We will work collaboratively to develop a Community Carbon Plan for the whole shire. We will develop a Community Adaptation Plan, to protect the people and species of the shire from the already unstoppable impacts of climate change.

¹⁹ City of Darebin, *Resources for Effective Local Government Climate Emergency Response: Darebin Council's Climate Emergency Journey*

4. *Global movement building* - we will reach out to other councils and institutions to support the building of this movement and to act strategically and collaboratively.
5. *Advocacy* - we will lobby state and federal government to act decisively on climate change. We will collaborate with others in this advocacy work, lobbying for effective action and significant changes in policy, legislation and funding at all government levels.

Council's planning framework

Council's planning framework is known as the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework (IP&R). Under this framework Council develops a Community Strategic Plan (CSP) on behalf of the community, which is reviewed once every 4 years after the election of a new Council.

Bellingen's CSP is known as the **Bellingen Community Vision 2027** and it identifies the long-term goals and priorities for the community. The **Delivery Program** then identifies which parts of the CSP the Council is responsible for and allows Council to set out specific priorities for its term of office. The **Operational Plan** specifies the activities to be undertaken each year and the **Resourcing Strategy** holistically describes the key resourcing requirements and is made up of the 10-year financial plan, the workforce strategy and the assets management policy, strategy and plan.

Council also has both a Climate Change Policy and a Sustainability Policy as well as a wealth of other plans and policies related to all aspects of council's service provision.

All of these documents will be reviewed in light of the climate emergency declaration.

Each service area within council is currently reviewing its work to identify how they can deliver services in a more sustainable, smarter, low carbon way.

Where to next?

Council are developing their Corporate Carbon Plan which outlines how council, as an organisation, will continue to reduce its carbon footprint, aiming for a 45% reduction by 2030 and to be carbon neutral by 2040.

Council will be consulting with the community in the development of the shire's first *Community Carbon Plan*. This plan will set shire-wide targets for carbon reduction, outline actions that the community and council can take to rapidly decarbonise our shire and build collaborative partnerships to make this happen.

We will also be working with the community to develop a *Climate Emergency Adaptation Plan* which will map what council and the community need to do to adapt to our changing climate in as fast, as equitable and as safe a way as possible, with the aim of protecting ourselves and our plants and animals, whilst we transition back to a more liveable climate.

MOTION

1. Bellingen Shire Council declares that “we are in a state of climate emergency that requires urgent action by all levels of government, including by local councils” and that council:
 - a. Notes the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) “Global Warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius” ;
 - b. Notes the Federal Government’s latest emissions data showing we are increasing, not reducing our carbon emissions;
 - c. Acknowledges that Bellingen Shire is, and is likely to be further affected by climate impacts, particularly sea level rise, bushfires, severe storms, drought and floods,
 - d. Recognises we are in a state of emergency that requires urgent action by all levels of government, that human induced climate change represents one of the greatest threats to humanity, civilisation, and other species, and that it is still possible to prevent the most catastrophic outcomes if, and only if, societies take emergency action now.
 - e. Participates in a Climate Emergency workshop by the end of 2019 to examine how our community strategic plan, works program and planning documents can address the Climate emergency, and results in an outline of options available to council to operationalise this emergency declaration.
2. Calls upon the State and Federal Governments to:
 - a. Declare a climate emergency, and
 - b. To back this up with legislated programs to drive emergency action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and meet the lower of the Paris Agreements at 1.5%
3. Writes to, the Member for Cowper, Member for Oxley, the Parliamentary Secretary for Northern NSW, the NSW Environment Minister and the Federal Environment Minister, advising them of Council’s resolution and urges them to acknowledge a climate emergency and to act with urgency to address the crisis.
4. Encourages neighbouring Local Government Areas to join with us by declaring a climate emergency, developing their own Climate Emergency Plans and advocating to State and Federal Governments as per point (2).

BACKGROUND

Climate emergency

The term climate emergency recognises that the Earth has reached key climate tipping points and that incremental action, i.e. gradual reduction of emissions over several decades, is no longer a reasonable course of action if we want a future for ourselves and our children.

For a viable future the world needs to go to net negative emissions as soon as possible. This will require:

- zero emissions across all sectors as soon as possible
- drawing down excess greenhouse gases on an ‘industrial’ scale using various strategies
- whatever else it takes to create cooling fast.

A role for local government?

With both state and national governments failing to stop or reverse global warming, we need to make progress where it can be made – at the third level of government. To date 380 countries have passed a motion around climate emergency internationally.

The goal is that higher levels of government use regulatory and economic instruments to help reverse global warming so the most important action of councils is to build pressure on higher levels of government for emergency action through making a climate emergency declaration, direct advocacy and building community pressure through education about the emergency and its solutions.

This advocacy must be backed up by meaningful emergency action locally. This Mayoral Minute proposes to address this issue productively, responsibly, and transparently by holding a Climate Emergency workshop by the end of 2019 to examine how our community strategic plan, works program and planning documents can address the Climate emergency, and results in an outline of options available to council to operationalise this emergency declaration.

Additional information can be found at the following:

<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/world-s-carbon-emissions-hit-record-high-and-australia-is-part-of-the-problem>

<https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/> IPCC report

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/dec/13/australias-carbon-emissions-highest-on-record-data-shows>

<https://www.coffscoastadvocate.com.au/news/record-smashed-as-brief-shower-provides-little-rel/3637765/>