



**Resource for Effective Local Government
Climate Emergency Response:**
Darebin Council's Climate Emergency Journey



Mayor's foreward

In 2016 Darebin Council became the first government body in the world to declare a climate emergency. Our leadership and initiative, spurred on by local community members, sparked a global movement, with hundreds of councils across multiple countries now calling for a climate emergency response.

We listened and responded when our community told us they were fed up with all levels of government not taking effective action on the climate emergency.

In Darebin we are already experiencing more droughts, more localised flooding and increased heatwaves. Sections of Darebin's population are significantly more vulnerable to these impacts, including our oldest and youngest residents, people with medical conditions, low-income households and people experiencing homelessness.

We could not stand by while our community's health, wellbeing and environment are at risk. We knew we needed urgent and decisive action to restore a safe climate, and to allow existing and future generations, communities and ecosystems to survive and thrive.

Through our Climate Emergency Plan that was adopted in 2017, we detail the actions we are taking as a Council to help restore our climate to safe levels. Our goals are to provide maximum protection for the community of Darebin and for people,

civilisation and species globally, especially the most vulnerable, and to restore a safe climate at emergency speed.

We cannot do this alone, we do not hold all the levers to make the changes required. However, local governments are in a great position to listen and act on behalf of our community, and to advocate for state and federal governments to create climate emergency policy that is long overdue.

The momentum has been building worldwide, and the growth in the number of councils that have formally recognised the climate emergency is critical in getting a climate emergency response adopted at higher levels of government. We are already starting to see this happen.

We invite other councils and levels of government to join us and declare a climate emergency, and importantly to follow through with an effective response. The work we do is vital, for now and for future generations, for humans and for the natural world.

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Introduction

Resource scope

This resource outlines Darebin Council's process of declaring and responding to the climate emergency, and outlines the key actions, lessons and challenges encountered so far.

The resource also provides a framework for councils to understand what it means to declare a climate emergency. It is an emerging and evolving area and this framework has been developed based on Darebin's experience and is a reflection on our journey so far.

The aim is that this document is a useful tool for other councils that either have declared a climate emergency, or are interested in knowing more.

What is the climate emergency?

Climate emergency is understood in two ways:

1. 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 on earth.

This aspect of the climate emergency is extensively documented. The science tells us that the earth has warmed, and is continuing to warm, and as a result we face serious consequences for the atmosphere, for weather systems, for human ability to produce food, and indeed for all people and species.¹²

2. The climate emergency **response** refers to a specific approach to tackling climate change, which seeks to mobilise and take action 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.

The target is to provide **maximum protection** globally for all species and all people.

A **safe climate** allows existing and future generations, communities and ecosystems to survive and flourish. We know that the current climatic conditions are not safe for a huge range of species and are increasingly unsafe for millions of people.

To restore a naturally safe climate we need a rapid transition to zero emissions across all sectors, as well as the drawdown of all the excess greenhouse gases in the air.

'Business as usual' and incremental or gradual improvements will not be enough.

A 1.5°C rise is not considered safe, and will not avoid dangerous climate change.

The technical solutions needed to transition to a zero emissions economy and beyond have been identified by science and research. What is needed now is appropriate political action and rapid implementation of the solutions.³

Why Darebin City Council declared a climate emergency

The unanimous decision of Darebin Councillors to declare a climate emergency at their first Council meeting in December 2016 was in response to growing community concerns about climate change.

Community members from groups such as Darebin Climate Action Now (DCAN) and Council and Community Action in the Climate Emergency (CACE) had been advocating for years for Darebin to take greater climate change action, as they were frustrated with all levels of government not doing enough. A community campaign to acknowledge and then act on the climate emergency included a climate emergency petition, and running climate emergency candidates in local, state and federal elections.

In the lead up to the Council elections, the majority of the candidates signed a petition stating that the world is in a climate emergency, and that as a Councillor they would act.

Why start with local government?

Local governments are fundamental in the climate emergency response. Experience is showing that local government is a good place to start government commitment to climate emergency action across the world - with so many councils it has been possible

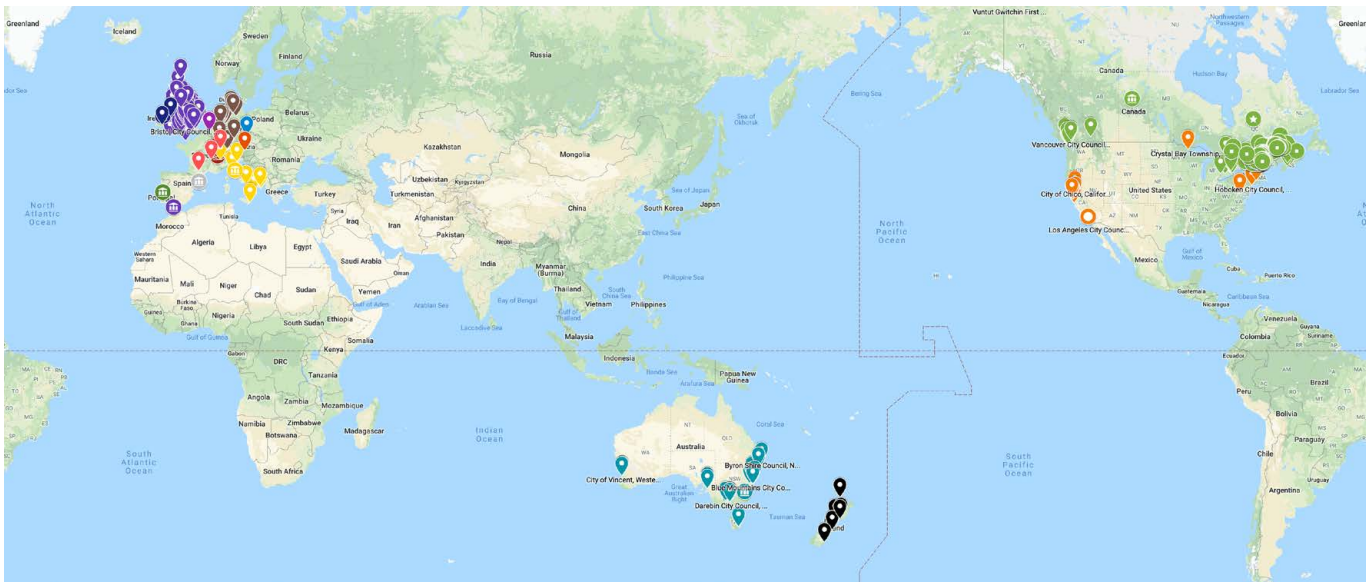
to find communities that are keen to be early movers on the climate emergency. Innovation is also more likely to be initiated at the local government level, because with so much diversity at this level of government different approaches to responding to the climate emergency will emerge. Local governments are also in a good position to network and learn from each other.

A lot can be practically done at a local government level, and councils have a large role in eliminating emissions across their municipality.

Councils also have an enormous legacy and experience in educating and working with their community. Typically, people have much more interaction with a council than other levels of government.

It is a natural progression that local councils can not only provide services and support through a climate change lens, but can also assist with channelling their community's desire for advocacy to state and federal governments.

Climate Emergency Declaration places





Why do we need state and federal governments to act?

It is not sustainable, practical or effective enough for the responsibility to lie solely with local councils. State and federal government policy, legislation and funding will have the biggest impact on the climate emergency. At the state and national level, policy changes needed include transitioning to 100% renewables; ending native deforestation; switching to electric or zero emissions transport; changes to agriculture; and minimum energy standards for buildings. We need to see a bipartisan approach to the climate emergency to enable the scale and speed of action that was seen during World War Two.

What we have seen from Darebin Council's declaration and subsequent action is normalising the framing of the issue that has fundamentally shifted in the public discourse - now state and federal MPs members are also using climate emergency terminology,

showing there has been a broader engagement across the political parties around the climate emergency.

The need for global action

In addressing the climate emergency, government authorities (no matter how small) should take responsibility for trying to engage the world in achieving the desired outcome of restoring a safe climate and providing maximum protection. Since global action is needed this means the decision-making body needs to act substantially via influence rather than only via what it can directly control.

The growing number of councils, and other levels of government, who have declared a climate emergency is essential in building a mandate for global action. Climate emergency councils can work strategically together to leverage their power.

Moving beyond tokenism

Five Key Processes

At Darebin Council, we recognise five key processes for local governments to declare and respond to the climate emergency.

Five Key Processes

PROCESS 1

Taking leadership: Declaring a climate emergency⁴

By declaring or acknowledging the climate emergency, your council is recognising the catastrophic changes to the world's climate caused by human activity and resulting in a loss of a safe climate, which threatens all life on earth. Your council is also committing to tackling climate change, by taking urgent action at a scale and speed that will restore a safe climate.

Example – Darebin's resolution on 5 December 2016:

'That Council recognises that we are in a state of climate emergency that requires urgent action by all levels of government, including by local councils.'

PROCESS 2

Get your house in order: Embed climate emergency action in all council strategies, plans and actions

Council has many levers to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and begin drawing down excess greenhouse gas emissions.

After declaring a climate emergency your council should develop a Climate Emergency Plan. This should outline all actions your council will take to embed a climate emergency response into its operations.

Engagement and advocacy should be a fundamental part of the Climate Emergency Plan.

Actions should include (but not be limited to):

- Switching to 100% renewable energy
- Getting off fossil gas
- Implementing energy efficiency across all facilities/buildings
- Redrafting procurement policy and practices to ensure suppliers to council are using renewable energy and resource recovery
- Embed climate emergency thinking into strategic planning and update planning schemes
- Refocus transport priorities to drive the shift to fossil fuel free transport
- Create a circular economy aimed at zero waste
- Increase your urban forest and/or revegetation activities
- Community education and empowerment to take action
- Increase community resilience to climate change impacts.

Climate emergency action also needs to be embedded across all of council, and reflected in all policies and strategies of council.

Inwards engagement with all staff and units of council is essential, particularly ensuring education and empowerment of managers happens early on.



PROCESS 3

Mobilise and build the climate emergency mandate: Get your community active

The current political situation combined with the climate emergency itself can seem an overwhelming, insurmountable problem, so large that it is difficult to imagine how our individual actions can have effect. By working together we can find the solutions locally, nationally and globally.

Councils can support our communities to take action, through raising awareness about the climate emergency; providing targeted programs to make homes and businesses powered by renewable energy; or mobilising volunteers to spread the climate emergency message to neighbourhoods, families, and workplaces.

Councils can show the community how to become politically active to encourage and motivate state and federal governments to act. Some ways for communities to become politically active are to join a climate action group and contact their state and/or federal member of parliament.

PROCESS 4

Global movement building: Reach out to other councils

Since the first council climate emergency declaration in 2016, we now have two national governments, eight state-level governments and over 600 local governments having declared, and this is rising every week.

The climate emergency movement has gained a huge momentum in a very short time because councils and their communities have been reaching out to engage their peers across their state, nation and globally. The current experience shows that this is a highly effective way of building the movement, and the necessary base of a democratic mandate for climate emergency action.

We now need to act strategically and collaboratively to figure out the key challenge: how we can make an effective and meaningful response beyond the declaration.

You can follow who has declared a climate emergency here:

<https://www.cedamia.org/global/>, and reach out to other councils to learn and share.

PROCESS 5

Upwards: Advocate to state and federal government

Councils cannot do the safe climate restoration work alone, and it is state, federal and global levels which will have the most powerful impact on the climate emergency. Collaborative campaigns - involving partners such as other councils, educational institutions, industry groups and community organisations - must advocate for effective action and significant changes to state, federal and international government policy, legislation and funding.

Darebin's Climate Emergency Plan

To begin Darebin's climate emergency response, Council developed a Climate Emergency Plan⁵ that details the key goals, leadership, advocacy, strategies and actions Darebin Council will take to respond urgently to address the climate emergency. The development of this plan and the actions within followed a review of Council's previous Climate Change Action Plan.

Within the Climate Emergency Plan, there are nine key directions to reach our core goals:

- Climate Emergency mobilisation and leadership
- Energy efficiency
- Renewable energy and fuel switching
- Zero emissions transport
- Consumption and waste minimisation
- Fossil fuel divestment
- Adaptation and resilience
- Engaging the community
- Climate Emergency Darebin



Differences in Climate Emergency Plan vs Climate Action Plan

Darebin's Climate Emergency Plan includes strong overarching goals based on a commitment to providing maximum protection for people, species and civilisation globally through the emergency speed restoration of a safe climate.

Key differences between the Climate Emergency Plan and the Climate Action Plan include greater emphasis on:

- Shifting council priorities and embedding climate emergency response across the organisation, including internal education and engagement of staff across the organisation.
- Engagement and collaboration with other councils in Victoria, Australia and globally.
- Advocacy to state and federal governments.
- Community mobilisation - engagement with the Darebin community (e.g. residents, ratepayers, workers, organisations and businesses) in order to build the Council's mandate, deliver solutions locally and mobilise local people.
- Drawdown of emissions, and moving beyond zero emissions. Darebin's previous climate action plans committed to net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 for both Council and community. The current Climate Emergency Plan aims to go beyond zero emissions, recognising that there is a need to draw down existing greenhouse gases from our atmosphere in order to restore a safe climate. While some methods for achieving this are known, this is an area in which methodologies and solutions at the scale required are still being developed and further research is essential. The Climate Emergency Plan recognises that we cannot reach zero emissions or beyond without a 100% renewable electricity system, which highlights the need to advocate for action at state and federal levels.

Highlights of Council actions implemented or underway

<p>Organisational review of all policies and programs to align with climate emergency. This is being done systematically as policies come up for review. For example, carbon abatement opportunities was a key priority in the review of the waste strategy.</p>	<p>Climate Emergency Conference, September 2018. This was the first-ever national climate emergency conference hosted by a local government, which aimed to bring together other councils, organisations, industry and the community in understanding the climate emergency challenge and response.</p>	<p>Working with other councils to spread climate emergency commitments, and facilitate collective action and shared communications, e.g. hosting two webinars linking up other councils around Australia and the world; developing an integrity framework for effective council climate emergency response; supporting councils who are looking to declare a climate emergency.</p>
<p>Developing a climate emergency advocacy program to engage state and federal government, e.g. climate emergency advocacy resolutions proposed to and adopted by the National General Assembly of Local Government.</p>	<p>Developing a carbon management plan to detail the actions Council is taking to reduce its municipal emissions.</p>	<p>Implementing Environmental Upgrade Agreements (EUA) for businesses and community groups to access cheap finance for large solar installs and other water, energy and waste saving upgrades.</p>
<p>Leading a local government power purchase agreement, which will generate new renewables to power not only Darebin Council's needs but also another 38 councils.</p>	<p>Innovative Solar Savers Program, which is supporting 1000 households across Darebin to switch to renewables.</p>	<p>Investigating new community solar models, including solar gardens and micro-grids.</p>
<p>Review of the Council fleet policy to upgrade the fleet to lowest emissions vehicles, and installation of solar charging stations (for public and Darebin Council staff).</p>	<p>Implementation of an Urban Food Production Plan, to increase the community production of food; facilitate equal access to safe and nutritious food; contribute to the local economy; and underpin healthy connected and resilient communities. The Urban Food Production Plan is being reviewed and updated to integrate with the climate emergency goals.</p>	<p>Education of the community about waste and sustainable purchasing and eating.</p>
<p>Review of procurement practices to improve climate and environmental outcomes.</p>	<p>Divesting from financial institutions that lend to fossil fuels, and undertake positive screening for banking and investment.</p>	<p>Communications research into how to effectively communicate the climate emergency and better engage our community to take action.</p>
<p>Hosting a community climate emergency dinner, where 80 people from across diverse groups and communities came together to learn about the climate emergency and key actions they can take.</p>	<p>Development of a Climate Emergency Ambassadors program, whereby community members sign up to help spread action among their peers.</p>	<p>Creation of Climate Emergency Darebin, a community Advisory Committee, to accelerate sustained and meaningful action to engage with the climate emergency challenge.</p>

Overcoming barriers and challenges

Scale and speed required

- To adequately address climate change we must move at great speed and scale, yet this pace is not the norm for government administrations.
- Our whole society is used to operating with incremental change, however incremental change will not actually work for the climate issue. It is a challenge to shift the community and the organisation into thinking about what a step-change would look like both, personally and politically.

Resources required

- Local government is responsible for delivering many essential services, and is a necessary safety net for many areas of the community.
- More resources are needed to adequately address the climate emergency, and decisions need to be made about where to re-prioritise budgets to respond during the emergency.

Embedding the response across the organisation

- Darebin has 1300 staff who are all now tasked with helping to implement the climate emergency response. However, staff are extremely busy undertaking their normal roles, and also need to learn more about the climate emergency to understand how it can apply to their work. Shifting the culture across the organisation and rolling out education about the climate emergency takes time.
- As a Council, some of our business-as-usual practices do not fit a climate emergency response. We are in the process of going through each process and practice to develop and implement best practice for the climate emergency, but this takes time and a large amount of staff effort.

Community engagement and mandate

- Council needs to be given the mandate by the community, and also to bring the community along with them to avoid the risk of backlash.
- It can be difficult to communicate the threat and need for action when many people are not yet experiencing an acute or immediate impact personally. Unless people feel like it is an emergency, it is hard to see the response measures as warranted.
- We need to give people a practical sense of how to take action. That is to re-engage with the ethics and the science, and go through a process of looking practically at what that means for people's everyday lives.

Uncharted territory

- Declaring a climate emergency is uncharted territory for us and for the world. As this has not been done before, there will be problems encountered in trying new ways of operating.
- We will need to learn as we go, and there will be different and conflicting ideas about how best to respond to the climate emergency.

Setting the bar on what the climate emergency means

- The climate emergency terminology is becoming more mainstream, which can mean that the understanding or dialogue around effective action could become watered down. For example, some groups or individuals discussing the climate emergency have used 2050 targets, which is not compatible with a climate emergency response.

Acting alone

- The City of Darebin is not yet in a climate emergency state. It has declared a climate emergency but it cannot get to a climate emergency state in isolation. There needs to be an alliance between the community and all three levels of government, and a sharing of experience across the globe.

Moving forward

Mobilisation of and engagement with other local councils around Australia and globally is a key direction of Darebin's climate emergency strategy. We all have a role to play in responding to the climate emergency.

We need to form strong, strategic alliances and collaborate in developing a climate emergency response. We can learn from each other, and also strengthen our power when advocating together for national and international change.

Darebin has been a world leader in declaring a climate emergency, however we cannot restore a safe climate as one council. Every person, community, council or country that gets on board and makes real and effective progress is escalating the momentum for change.

Together we can achieve what is needed. By acting now and encouraging systemic change, we can create a safe and sustainable future for our planet.

1 <http://www.bom.gov.au/state-of-the-climate/2016/>

2 Spratt, David (2018) "Beyond urgent: the science of climate warming as existential risk". Presentation to Darebin Climate Emergency Conference <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KaEfK-MII4U>

3 Hansen, J., Sato, M., Kharecha, P., von Schuckmann, K., Beerling, D. J., Cao, J., Marcott, S., Masson-Delmotte, V., Prather, M. J., Rohling, E. J., Shakun, J., Smith, P., Lacs, A., Russell, G., and Ruedy, R.: Young people's burden: requirement of negative CO₂ emissions, *Earth Syst. Dynam.*, 8, 577-616, <https://www.earth-syst-dynam.net/8/577/2017/>.

4 <http://www.caceonline.org/motions-to-declare-a-climate-emergency.html>

5 Darebin Climate Emergency Plan http://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/-/media/cityofdarebin/Files/Darebin-Living/CaringfortheEnvironment/EnergyandClimate/ClimateChange/DarebinClimateEmergencyPlan_updated5Dec2018_webready.ashx?la=en



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