

Resolution of Council

17 February 2020

Item 3.5

Responding to the Climate Emergency – Natural Disasters and Resilience

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

Australia on the frontline of the climate crisis

The bushfire crisis this summer has been that wake-up call for many Australians. The climate emergency that scientists have been warning us about – has suddenly become very real.

The scale of the loss of life, both human and animal, has been horrifying. By the end of January, 10.7 million hectares had burnt across Australia, the fires had claimed over 2,000 homes, over a billion animals and tragically 32 people - including eight firefighters.

These bushfires were unprecedented and occurred in the context of only 1.1 degrees of global warming from the pre-industrial average.

As Richard Flanagan, award-winning Australian novelist wrote recently in the New York Times:

“The name of the future is Australia. These words come from it, and they may be your tomorrow: P2 masks, evacuation orders, climate refugees, ochre skies, warning sirens, ember storms, blood suns, fear, air purifiers and communities reduced to third-world camps.

Billions of dead animals and birds bloating and rotting. Hundreds of Indigenous cultural and spiritual sites damaged or destroyed by bushfires, so many black Notre Dames – the physical expression of Indigenous Australia’s spiritual connection to the land severed, a final violence after centuries of dispossession.

Everywhere there is a brittle grief, and it may be as much as for what is coming as for what is gone.”

The International Panel on Climate Change has told us that we have to limit global heating to 1.5 degrees to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

They’ve told us that we need to achieve net zero emissions across the globe by 2050 to have anything better than a fifty-fifty chance of limiting heating to 1.5 degrees.

People think that if the world meets its Paris Agreements targets, we’ll be ok – we won’t.

The UN’s 2019 Emissions Gap Report has told us that with the current Nationally Determined Commitments made under the Paris Agreement, we’re on track to experience 3.2 degrees of heating.

This will be catastrophic for Australia. According to the American climatologist Michael Mann, “It is conceivable that much of Australia simply becomes too hot and dry for human habitation.”

The Federal Government’s target of 26-28 per cent reduction in emissions is pathetic and they’re not even on track to meet that.

According to a recent United Nations report, what is happening in Australia is ‘one of the world’s largest fossil fuel expansions’ with proposals for 53 new coal mines.

Australia’s fossil fuel industry is already huge, thanks to massive taxpayer subsidies – some \$29 billion in 2015, according to a 2019 paper by the International Monetary Fund. Every Australian man, woman and child is underwriting their own apocalypse to the tune of \$1,198 per year. And yet only 37,800 people are employed in coal mining.

We are a global laggard, and that’s shameful, because as one of the wealthiest nations on Earth, with access to some of the best renewable resources, and some of the world’s most innovative and creative thinkers, it’s our responsibility to move faster.

Most importantly, as the driest continent on earth we are on the frontline of global warming. We can, and must do more! We need to be in a strong position to argue to those big emitters - like China, the United States and India and others - to reduce their emissions and keep the planet below 1.5 degrees.

The City of Sydney’s strong record on addressing climate change

By 2050, cities must be part of a decarbonised world.

The City of Sydney declared a Climate Emergency in June last year as a call to action, even though addressing global warming has been our top priority since 2008.

In 2008, we set a goal to reduce our emissions by 70 per cent by 2030. We set the targets and worked hard to achieve them over the past decade. This included retrofitting our buildings, installing solar and batteries, buying electric vehicles, upgrading our street lighting to LED, building a bike network, installing tri-generation and much more.

We were Australia’s first carbon neutral council in 2007 and by 2017, we had reduced emissions from our own operations by 25 per cent and worked with others to reduce emissions city-wide by 21 per cent. During this time, our economy grew by 37.5 per cent and our resident population increased 45 per cent - if it had been business as usual, emissions would have increased by 57 per cent.

The City has been leading by example through its own operations and providing progress updates in detailed bi-annual Green Reports. The City also influences the wider city area through advocacy, incentives (such as the City's grants programs), programs and collaboration through partnerships.

The City has retrofitted many of our properties to reduce electricity and water use, slashing carbon emissions by 6,500 tonnes and generating savings of more than \$2.3 million.

We have installed 6,124 solar panels across 40 City owned buildings - one of the largest rooftop solar programs in Australia.

With transmission provider Transgrid, we installed a 500kWh Tesla battery at our new depot in Alexandria. Complementing 1600 solar panels, together they will avoid 600 tonnes of carbon emissions each year.

Fleet emissions are 16 per cent below 2006 levels, which we've achieved by reducing the number of vehicles, downsizing and using hybrid and electric passenger vehicles, driver behaviour training, hybrid diesel/electric trucks and use of biodiesel.

Our leading programs include the Better Buildings Partnership, CitySwitch Green Office, the Sustainable Destinations Partnership and the Smart Green Apartments program.

The Better Buildings Partnership is a leading collaboration of property owners, managers and key influencers, who signed up to the goals of the City's Sustainable Sydney 2030 plan in 2011.

So far, they have reduced their emissions by 56 per cent, and are tracking toward an 83 per cent reduction by 2030 – which will be ahead of their original target of 70 per cent emissions reductions by 2030. They have also reduced their water use by 26 per cent since 2006 and saved businesses over \$30 million a year.

The City has approved over \$5.2 million in cash and value-in-kind since 2006 into over 380 grants with an environmental focus.

An important part of the City's climate leadership has been engaging with other global cities through the C40 network, which Sydney joined in 2007.

Participating cities commit to practical action to cut greenhouse gas emissions, stimulate business, community and government action on climate change, and provide leadership internationally.

C40 supports cities to collaborate effectively, share knowledge and drive meaningful, measurable and sustainable action on climate change.

Almost ten years ago, the City of Sydney decided to retrofit the City's street lights with LEDs, based on what we learned from another C40 city – Los Angeles.

Sydney was the first Australian city to install energy-efficient LED street lights on a large scale as part of a \$7 million project. We've replaced 6,000 city-owned street and park lights, reducing GHG emissions by over 2,000 tonnes a year and saving nearly \$800,000 a year in electricity and maintenance costs.

In August 2018, Council agreed to pay Ausgrid to fast-track replacement of their remaining 9,500 street lights. When this project is complete it will save over \$1 million in energy and maintenance costs, and 3,400 tonnes of carbon a year. So far over 2,000 fittings have been replaced.

The biggest single action we've taken is to switch to 100 per cent renewable electricity.

The City's new electricity contract, which will see our electricity sourced from 100 per cent renewable electricity by July this year will support jobs on solar and wind farms in regional Glen Innes, Wagga Wagga and the Shoalhaven, and will save our ratepayers \$500,000 a year over 10 years.

It also means we will achieve our 70 per cent 2030 emissions reduction target by 2024, six years early.

The need for further action

The City has a long history of climate leadership, but the bushfires this summer have shown that we must once again go beyond our traditional remit to strive for even faster action.

I refer to Ross Garnaut who foresees that, if we rise to the challenge of climate change, we "will emerge as a global superpower in energy, low-carbon industry and absorption in the landscape."

And Ross Gittins says that to maximise our changes of benefitting from the move to a low-carbon world, however, we have to get to zero net emissions sooner than the other rich countries, not later!

Council will discuss tonight proposed new environmental targets to reach net zero emissions for our local government area by 2040 as part of the Sustainable Sydney 2050 Plan. This is critical to help us achieve that.

The City's Climate Emergency Response, also coming to Council tonight, outlines our ambition and a framework to accelerate action on climate change.

In response to the unprecedented bushfires and extreme weather over this summer, there is a new urgency to find an accord across the country to reduce emissions.

A Carbon Market Institute survey of more than 200 businesses showed that 96 per cent of those surveyed believe Australia should not delay the transition to a decarbonised economy. The Business Council of Australia supports achieving net zero by 2050. All of the States and Territories have committed to net zero by 2050.

I ask Council to support national action to respond the climate crisis, including the national campaign by Independent Federal MP, Zali Steggall, to find bipartisan support for a national science-based target to reach net zero emissions by 2050 and pass the Climate Change Act in Federal Parliament.

Australia must shed its status as the international pariah of world climate change negotiations, and instead take a leadership role at the next United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (UNFCCC COP26) meeting in Scotland – starting with dropping our shameful demand to use carryover credits.

As the bushfires swept across the country over summer, the world watched in horror. Communities and local governments across the country were galvanised by the need to protect our communities from climate-induced natural disasters.

That is why, in dialogue with C40, the upcoming climate conference in March needs to be refocused to invite mayors and representatives from local governments across Australia to share information and learn from global C40 leaders about practical actions to increase resilience against future disasters, mitigate climate change and work together towards a just transition to a more prosperous low-carbon future powered by cheaper renewable energy sources.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council note that the Chief Executive Officer is working with C40 to refocus the upcoming climate conference in response to the summer of climate-induced bushfires and extreme weather to invite mayors and local government representatives from across the country;
- (B) Council support national action to:
 - (i) pass the Climate Change Act in Federal Parliament and set a science-based national target for zero-emissions by 2050 or sooner;
 - (ii) abandon the use of carryover credits to meet Australia's Nationally Determined Contribution, and commit to a stronger national emissions reduction target at the 2020 United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (UNFCCC COP 26); and
 - (iii) establish a Just Transition Authority to secure jobs and revive the manufacturing sector by transitioning to a green economy; and
- (C) the Lord Mayor be requested to write to Federal Ministers and Shadow Ministers responsible for climate change and energy policy seeking their support for the national action listed above.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE

Lord Mayor

Moved by the Chair (the Lord Mayor), seconded by Councillor Miller –

That the Minute by the Lord Mayor be endorsed and adopted.

Variation. At the request of Councillor Scott, and by consent, the Lord Mayor varied the Minute, such that it read as follows:

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council note that the Chief Executive Officer is working with C40 to refocus the upcoming climate conference in response to the summer of climate-induced bushfires and extreme weather to invite mayors and local government representatives from across the country;
- (B) Council support national action to:
 - (i) pass a Climate Change Act in Federal Parliament and set a science-based national target for zero-emissions by 2050 or sooner;
 - (ii) abandon the use of carryover credits to meet Australia's Nationally Determined Contribution, and commit to a stronger national emissions reduction target at the 2020 United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (UNFCCC COP 26); and
 - (iii) establish a Just Transition Authority to secure jobs and revive the manufacturing sector by transitioning to a green economy; and
- (C) the Lord Mayor be requested to write to Federal Ministers and Shadow Ministers responsible for climate change and energy policy seeking their support for the national action listed above.

The Minute, as varied by consent, was carried unanimously.

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