

Item 3.3

Our Response to the Climate Emergency

File No: S051491

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

Successive Federal Governments have shamefully presided over a climate disaster, and now we are at a critical juncture – we face a climate emergency.

In October 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) indicated that global emissions need to be cut in half by 2030, and at net zero by 2050 to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. 2018 was the forty-second consecutive year with global temperatures above the twentieth century average, with 224 locations around the world set all time heat records.

Extreme heat is now the deadliest natural disaster in the United States, killing more people on average than hurricanes, lightning, tornadoes, earthquakes, and floods combined. Globally, floods and extreme rainfall events now occur four times more often than four decades ago.

On January 24 2019, 91 of the hottest 100 places on earth were in Australia. Heat waves on our continent are now five times more likely. But it is not just their frequency that is alarming – they start earlier, become hotter, and last longer.

This emergency is not just about the numbers, it is about our communities, and its impacts are felt by us all, particularly the poorest amongst us – the vulnerable, the marginalised and those that live in remote communities.

With 96 per cent of NSW still drought affected, our farmers and rural communities are being decimated by drought, suffering from water shortages and extended bush fire seasons, witnessing unprecedented fish kills and the death of once mighty river systems.

Our Pacific Ocean neighbours face displacement as sea levels rise, and soaring temperatures also impact on the increasing number of us that live in cities.

The lack of leadership by Federal and some State Governments to transition to a green economy has had devastating impacts beyond the environment, causing fear in our communities. Thousands face unemployment, denied potential jobs in a burgeoning renewable energy sector, and the sovereignty and self-determination of First Australians continues to be undermined to make way for massive new coal mines.

Inaction also comes with an economic cost. The University of Melbourne estimates the potential damage from climate change to Australia – excluding the costs from floods, fires, pollution and biodiversity loss – will equate to \$585 billion by 2030, and \$760 billion by 2050. These costs will be disproportionately shouldered by those that can least afford it.

The community understands that the situation is urgent. When the City of Sydney consulted for our long term strategic plan - Sustainable Sydney 2030 - 97 per cent of people said they wanted strong climate action, so we made it our top priority.

We set a goal to reduce the City's emissions by 70 per cent by 2030, and – following the Paris Climate Agreement in 2015 – we set a more ambitious goal to reach net zero emissions by 2050. Between 2012 and 2016, we developed master plans for energy efficiency, renewable energy, waste and climate adaptation, and we regularly monitor progress.

We became Australia's first carbon neutral council in 2007, and as of June 2017, we'd reduced the emissions of our own operations by 25 per cent through actions such as the installation of solar panels, LED lights, tri-generation and a Tesla battery trial. In 2020, we will transition to 100 per cent renewable energy, allowing us to meet our 2030 target in 2024 - six years early.

We've also committed to reduce emissions beyond our own operations across our local government area to zero by 2050. We cannot mandate this so we established partnerships with companies and institutions in the city. In June 2017, these partnerships with business had contributed to a reduction of emissions across the City of Sydney of 20 per cent.

Despite this work, and the combined action of other City Governments, some State Governments, the community and business, Australia's greenhouse gas emissions have increased for four consecutive years. In comparison, the previous carbon pricing scheme effectively reduced emissions. It is clear that the current Federal Government's policies are simply not working.

The Federal Government must act urgently to address this emergency, by working with other levels of government and the business community to reach its Paris Agreement commitments and to deliver a just transition.

All Federal and State politicians must rise above fear-based politics to unite the community behind a vision of a low carbon economy that provides opportunities for all of us, including workers who currently rely on fossil fuel industries for employment. We know the transition to renewables and a low carbon economy can be achieved, because countries all across the world are doing it successfully. It just takes leadership.

Nations like Germany and Spain are investing heavily to support their people. Germany's 'coal exit commission' brought together industry, environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society and policymakers to agree on a pathway to phase out coal. They are committing billions of euros in support to affected areas. This is the kind of leadership Federal Government must provide to achieve its Paris Agreement commitments and to support our communities in the transition away from fossil fuels.

In an emergency, it is incumbent on all of us to act. As the City of Sydney develops its strategic plan for 2050, we have an opportunity to speak with the community about new ways to accelerate our action on climate even further, working in partnership with our residents and business community.

In consultations to date, our community has told us they are proud of the action the City has taken on climate change, and that they want us do even more. Just last week, over 300 leaders from our business community, community organisations, government and cultural institutions gathered in Town Hall for our 2050 stakeholder consultation. Of those asked whether the City should declare a climate emergency, 85 per cent answered yes. They join over 50 climate action groups that support the Climate Emergency Declaration campaign, the 3,000 people who have signed a change.org petition, and activists from Extinction Rebellion and the International Climate Emergency Forum calling on the City of Sydney to join the declaration.

I believe this Council should declare a climate emergency, step up our efforts to hold the Federal Government to account and explore new strategies for making the city more sustainable into the future, and fostering our green economy.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council declare that climate change poses a serious risk to the people of Sydney, and it should be treated as a national emergency;
- (B) Council call on the Federal Government to respond to this emergency by:
 - (i) taking urgent action to meet the emissions reduction targets contained in the Paris Agreement by reintroducing a price on carbon; and
 - (ii) establishing a Just Transition Authority, with enough funding to ensure that Australians employed in the fossil fuel industries have viable and appropriate opportunities for alternate employment;
- (C) Council note that the City has an excellent record on reducing emissions, and preparing for the impacts of climate change;
- (D) Council note that the City will be holding the C40 Women for Climate conference in April 2020, bringing together leaders from across the world to exchange ideas and work together on climate change solutions;
- (E) Council note the importance of getting beyond the politics of fear, and the success of '2040', an inspiring and refreshing documentary that explores what could be achieved by implementing technologies and other climate change solutions that already exist;
- (F) Council note that Alex Greenwich MP, Greg Piper MP and Joe McGirr MP have written to the Premier of NSW, asking her to protect coal communities from serious economic disruption as a result of an expected decline in the coal export market;
- (G) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to note this emergency declaration and ensure the 2050 plan addresses the community's desire for climate action; and
- (H) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to investigate a screening of the documentary '2040' at the Town Hall as part of the Sustainable Sydney 2050 consultation.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE

Lord Mayor