## Why climate *emergency*?

Using the term climate emergency recognises that the Earth has reached key climate tipping points and that incremental action, i.e. gradual reduction of emissions from stationary energy alone 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,* which will involve:

* Zero emissions across all sectors as soon as possible (the Beyond Zero Emissions 10-year transition plans have mapped how this could occur across most sectors).
* Drawing down excess greenhouse gases on an ‘industrial’ scale using various strategies (see Tim Flannery’s ‘Atmosphere of Hope’ and Paul Hawken’s ‘Drawdown’).
* Whatever else it takes to create cooling fast.

The degree of investment required for this to occur doesn’t gel with a business-as-usual or market-signals approach. We need to legislate and mobilise resources similar to the level of directed investment that occurred during WWII.

## Why local government?

With both state and federal governments failing to stop let alone reverse global warming, we need to make progress where it can be made – at the 3rd level of government.

If we go back to the basic 3Rs of local government (rates, roads, rubbish) each R is a big lever for reducing or drawing down emissions[[1]](#footnote-1). There’s also R for *resilience*, for which local governments will also bear the cost as climate impacts intensify. Many other council activities are also potential climate levers. The idea is to work with other councils to innovate, build economies of scale and help develop strategies which can then be used across society.

Direct advocacy, raising public awareness, and positive action on the climate emergency at council level will educate other councils and ultimately pressure higher levels of government into meaningful action to reverse global warming (sideways, downwards and upwards).

This advocacy role is key, for without acting loudly the actions will only count towards the emissions negation that an individual council can reach, which is not enough.

## How can councils implement a climate emergency response?

At a minimum, the Council should:

1. Pass a motion that acknowledges the ‘climate emergency’, that all levels of government need to act, that business as usual transition is not fast enough.
2. Develop a Climate Emergency Plan (CEP). This should include ambitious but not unrealistic goals and targets, and room to adapt when new opportunities present.[[2]](#footnote-2)
3. Prioritise response to the climate emergency in the Strategic Plan.
4. Build the capacity of staff around climate emergency.
5. Develop an active relationship with the community so it can support and even undertake some of the necessary work.

Steps 1-4 mean that the CEO will be held accountable for the success of the CEP’s implementation and that the Council can leverage investment in a climate emergency response.

Mobilising council resources will relate more to mobilising the community although considerable leverage can also occur fiscally.

## What has happened to date?

Is has been just over a year since Darebin Council, Victoria, unanimously passed a motion (Oct 2016) to declare a climate emergency. In the past year, Darebin:

* Put a similar climate emergency motion to the MAV, supported by 77% of Victorian councils.
* Developed a climate emergency plan and prioritised this in their Strategic Plan.
* Created a ‘climate emergency officer’ position while capacity building existing staff
* Sought community input towards setting up a climate emergency foundation to work with council
* Increased the capacity of their Solar $avers program five-fold (made possible because of the CEP).
* Scheduled a climate emergency conference later in the year for councils and community.

Beyond Victoria:

* Three US local governments (including Los Angeles County) have passed similar motions, following the lead of Darebin Council.
* The West Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) published draft climate policy, demanding urgent action and recognising the role of councils (March 2018).
* Vincent Council, Western Australia, passed a climate emergency motion (March 2018).
* Los Angeles will create a Climate Emergency Mobilization Department (April 2018), which is projected to have authority over all other City departments.

## Where can I find out more?

General rationale [www.CACEonline.org](http://www.caceonline.org)

RSTI’s Phillip Sutton’s initial strategic document on Local Councils and Climate Emergency Action

<http://www.caceonline.org/uploads/1/2/7/5/12758111/local_first-implementation_local-govt.pdf>

Darebin Climate Emergency Plan <https://www.yoursaydarebin.com.au/climateaction>

Los Angeles declaration <https://www.theclimatemobilization.org/single-post/2017/10/15/The-Climate-Mobilization-Begins-in-Los-Angeles>. Climate Emergency Mobilization Department <http://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2018/18-0054_CA_05-01-2018.pdf>

Interview with Darebin Councillors <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jpsUuuxBjs&t=2s>

1. For example, **Roads** – cycling and pedestrian infrastructure, free parking and chargers for low or zero emissions vehicles; **Rates** – divest the investment, implement a Solar $avers program through rates; **Rubbish** – turn all organic council waste into biochar (which sequesters carbon for 100s-1000s of years and stops methane emissions), recycling and reduction strategies. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Council may set a negative emissions target and then quantify what they are unable to reach. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)