

5.1. CLIMATE CHANGE SUBMISSION TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT & HERITAGE PROTECTION

REPORT AUTHOR(S): Nicola Learmond, Sustainability Officer
GENERAL MANAGER: Paul Hoyer, General Manager Operations
DEPARTMENT: Sustainable Communities

RECOMMENDATION

That Council resolves to support and submit the attached Climate Change submission to the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Department of Environment and Heritage Protection invited Douglas Shire Council to provide a submission regarding Climate Change Mitigation Strategies in Queensland.

BACKGROUND

The Queensland Government recognises the need to adapt to the effects of a changing climate and to mitigate the effects of climate change through reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Queensland Government is in the process of exploring options for climate change mitigation. The government plans to reduce emissions in innovative ways including:

- Supporting measures associated with renewable energy, particularly focusing on solar and a mandate for biofuels; and
- Reintroducing vegetation protection measures to decrease emissions associated with clearing.

The government supports greater use of renewable energy, with key commitments announced under A Solar Future plan including:

- Setting a target of one million solar rooftops by 2020.
- Investigating a 50% renewable energy target for 2030.
- Supporting up to 60 megawatts of large-scale solar power generation through a renewable energy reverse auction.

These measures will complement and support the government's commitment to protect the Great Barrier Reef including to 'keep carbon in the ground' through vegetation protection measures. 2015 was the hottest year since record keeping began and after the summer of 2016, only 7% of the Great Barrier Reef was unaffected by coral bleaching.

Discussion Paper & Submission

The Queensland Government has released the discussion paper, '[Advancing Climate Action in Queensland: Making the transition to a low carbon future](#)' providing some of the best examples of work being done throughout Australia to tackle climate change. Part of the discussion paper seeks input from councils, organisations and the wider public to ensure the right strategies are developed to achieve a low carbon future.

The public are asked to contribute by filling out a survey on the [Get Involved](#) Queensland Government website; whilst councils and organisations are able to submit a written submission.

The deadline for both survey and written submissions is Friday 2 September 2016.

COMMENT

The Queensland Government is committed to implementing various climate change mitigation policies and strategies. Council has the opportunity to help shape these by making a climate change submission to the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection.

A number of suggestions in the submission build upon ideas presented in the Queensland Government's climate change discussion paper. The submission proposes that the Queensland Government should consider the following climate change mitigation strategies:

Energy Efficiency

- Encourage the uptake of renewable energy and employment in this sector by continuing to offer initiatives such as the Solar Credits subsidy.

Land Use Planning

- Continue to protect carbon stores, including mangroves and rainforests.
- Consider allowing local governments to put in place additional minimum planning standards aimed at encouraging renewable energy, for example new building developments requiring solar panels.

Low Emission Transport System

- Continue to work towards providing a reliable and green electricity network which can support the uptake of electric vehicles.
- Recognise the additional challenges faced by rural communities when designing an electric charging network, for example the requirement for prolonged battery life and a rural network of charging stations. Consider supporting hybrid vehicles where electric cars may be an unrealistic option for some rural communities, particularly in the short-medium term.

Waste & Recycling

- State support highlighting the need to reduce plastic bags across Queensland, this would directly benefit the Plastic Free Douglas initiative.
- Consider launching a State wide communication program highlighting the importance of recycling.
- Consider utilising anaerobic digestion facilities in urban areas which capture methane gases released by organic material (e.g. food waste), and turn that waste into energy. Methane has a global warming potential of 28 times that of carbon dioxide (CO₂).
- Reconsider implementing a landfill levy amount similar to South Australia, NSW, Victoria and Western Australia to make recycling more cost effective compared to landfill.
- Consider making recycling a legal requirement for all households and businesses. The European Union introduced similar legislation in 2009.

PROPOSAL

That Council resolves to support and submit the attached Climate Change submission to the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection.

FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There is currently no additional financial or resource implications for Council in making a Climate Change submission to the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

At the 21st United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference staged in Paris in December 2015, more than 200 nations, including Australia, accepted unanimously that climate change is real and that urgent action is required to reduce global carbon emissions.

The Queensland Government accepts the overwhelming scientific consensus on the causes and consequences of climate change and sees understanding the emissions generated as the important step towards developing a strategy for tackling carbon pollution in Queensland. If Queensland takes no new steps to reduce its carbon pollution, the baseline scenario projects emissions would rise by 35% by 2030. Among other things this would have a devastating and lasting effect on The Great Barrier Reef.

Council has a responsibility to ensure it conducts activities in a sustainable and environmentally conscious way. Climate change poses various additional challenges on Council, particularly around disaster management and conservation of the rainforests and Great Barrier Reef. In order to address these challenges Council is currently preparing a Sustainability Policy and a Coastal Hazards Adaptation Strategy.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic: Climate change has the potential to have a devastating affect on the economy. More intense cyclones will result in greater economic loss to property, businesses and infrastructure, and lead to lost productivity. Destruction of rainforests and the Great Barrier Reef will negatively affect the Shire's tourism industry.

Environmental: Climate change is the single greatest threat to Australia's biodiversity. For example, Australia's oceans could become too acidic to support coral reefs and other calcifying marine organisms.

Social: Rising sea levels pose a significant risk to coastal communities. Evidence suggests an increasing number of heatwaves will lead to more heat-related deaths. Under moderately warmer and wetter climate conditions, there may be an increase in the prevalence of some mosquito-borne diseases.

CORPORATE/OPERATIONAL PLAN, POLICY REFERENCE

This report has been prepared in accordance with the following:

Corporate Plan 2014-2019 Initiatives:

Theme 1 - Celebrating Our Communities

1.2.3 - Develop and support opportunities to build resilience and sustainability of community groups and agencies.

1.2.4 - Network, advocate and partner with stakeholders to achieve positive outcomes.

Theme 4 - Engage, Plan, Partner

4.2.3 - Work with regional, state, national and international stakeholders to promote beneficial partnerships to support strong, resilient and sustainable communities.

Operational Plan 2015-2016 Actions:

3.1.2 - Development of the Sustainability Strategy incorporating targets for reducing Council's carbon footprint.

3.1.8 - Implement opportunities to remove disposable plastic bags in the Shire.

COUNCIL'S ROLE

Council can play a number of different roles in certain circumstances and it is important to be clear about which role is appropriate for a specific purpose or circumstance. The implementation of actions will be a collective effort and Council's involvement will vary from information only through to full responsibility for delivery.

The following areas outline where Council has a clear responsibility to act:

Advocate Supporting communities and groups by advocating for certain actions from other organisations (usually other levels of government).

Information Provider Bringing people together to develop solutions to problems.

CONSULTATION

Internal: Consultation has taken place with the Resource Management and the Development Assessment & Coordination teams.

External: The Department of Environment and Heritage Protection

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This is a Department-led engagement activity. The Department is providing the opportunity for wider public comment via its website.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Climate Change Submission Letter to the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection September 2016

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

OUR REF: 785507

1 September 2016

climatechange@ehp.qld.gov.au

To Whom It May Concern

RE : Climate Change Submission

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission regarding Climate Change Mitigation Strategies.

As the Mayor and Councillors of Douglas Shire, where the Rainforest meets the Reef, we consider these exceptional world heritage listed environments as central to our communities' and our visitors' social, environmental and financial wellbeing.

We recognise that climate change mitigation and adaptation is crucial for long term environmental sustainability and resilience. In order to do our part we are in the process of developing a Sustainability Policy which will include Council's carbon footprint; and a Coastal Hazard Adaptation Strategy.

We recognise that Queensland would benefit from transitioning towards a greener, low carbon economy. In order to support this vision we propose the following ideas under the four key themes outlined in the 'Advancing Climate Action in Queensland: Making the transition to a low carbon future' discussion paper.

Energy Efficiency

- Encourage the uptake of renewable energy and employment in this sector by continuing to offer initiatives such as the Solar Credits subsidy.

Land Use Planning

- Continue to protect carbon stores, including mangroves and rainforests.
- Consider allowing local governments to put in place additional planning minimum standards aimed at

encouraging renewable energy, for example new building developments requiring solar panels.

Low Emission Transport System

- Continue to work towards providing a reliable and green electricity network which can support the uptake of electric vehicles.
- Recognise the additional challenges faced by rural communities when designing an electric charging network, for example the requirement for prolonged battery life and a rural network of charging stations. Consider supporting hybrid vehicles where electric cars may be an unrealistic option for some rural communities, particularly in the short-medium term.

Waste & Recycling

- State support highlighting the need to reduce plastic bags across Queensland. In the environment plastic bags are detrimental to birds, marine animals and ecosystems, as well as human health and the economy. The average bag is used for 12 minutes but takes 1000 years to break up. Council supports the initiative 'Plastic Free Douglas' which aims to reduce the number of disposable plastic bags ending up as litter and landfill within the Douglas Shire.
- Consider launching a State wide communication program highlighting the importance of recycling. Although it is recognised that local tailored recycling education programs are required to ensure communities segregate and recycle waste correctly for local waste treatment plants, there is a need to educate the wider population on the benefits of recycling, even in small amounts. Part of this initiative could involve a phased approach of nationally standardised bin colours making it easier for visitors to recycle when travelling between states.
- Consider utilising anaerobic digestion facilities in urban areas which capture methane gases released by organic material (e.g. food waste), and turn that waste into energy. European Union evidence suggests that based on life-cycle analysis of food waste, anaerobic digestion is environmentally better than composting and other recovery options. This in part is because methane has a global warming potential of 28 times that of carbon dioxide (CO₂).
- Reconsider implementing a landfill levy amount similar to South Australia, NSW, Victoria and Western Australia to make recycling more cost effective compared to landfill. This would particularly help rural businesses and

communities where transport costs can make recycling financially unattractive.

- Consider making recycling a legal requirement for all households and businesses. The European Union introduced similar legislation in 2009.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss the progression of our identified ideas and any alternatives you or Departmental officers may suggest.

Please do not hesitate to contact Nicola Learmond at any time on 0740 999 511 or Nicola.Learmond@douglas.qld.gov.au

Yours faithfully

Councillor Julia Leu
MAYOR
DOUGLAS SHIRE COUNCIL