

Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation) Bill 2020 and Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation) (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2020.

Opening

Local Government NSW (LGNSW) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy.

Local Government NSW (LGNSW) is the peak body for local government in NSW, representing all NSW general purpose councils and related entities. LGNSW facilitates the development of an effective community based system of local government in the State.

Due to the short timeframe of the Inquiry, this is a draft submission awaiting review by the LGNSW Board. Any revisions made by the Board will be forwarded to the Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy.

LGNSW advocacy priority

Urgent action is needed to address the climate emergency in a bipartisan manner to make clear, effective and unambiguous steps to avert a climate crisis in Australia. This call to action is a resolution of the 2019 LGNSW annual conference led by City of Ryde, and reflected in similar motions from North Sydney, Blue Mountains, Lismore, Bellingen and Parkes Councils.

NSW councils have identified four priority areas for action to address climate change:

- a) reduction of Australia's carbon emissions through effective mitigation strategies;
- b) planning for and adapting to a changing climate;
- c) significant structural adjustment in businesses and communities which may arise from transitioning to a low carbon economy and adapting to the impacts of climate change; and
- d) the provision of leadership and support for both councils and their communities.

Background

Australia is very vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and even a 1.5°C increase in warming will have severe impacts for local government to manage. Climate change has the potential to damage council assets, cause serious disruptions to the delivery of council services, generate unbudgeted financial impacts and affect the wellbeing of the community, particularly those vulnerable to weather extremes. NSW local government is prioritising reducing carbon emissions and adaptation to avoid the worst impacts. More than 82% of NSW councils have undertaken a climate change risk assessment and are implementing adaptation responses.

Response

Division 2 – Guiding principles

LGNSW supports the guiding principles of:

- effective, efficient and equitable action
- informed decision making
- fiscal responsibility
- fair employment transition

- community engagement and self-determination
- national and international cooperation.

Some of these guiding principles touch on LGNSW's own policy principles and demonstrate good governance practice.

Part 2 – National climate change risk assessment

Understanding the likelihood and severity of climate risks to assets, people and the environment is an essential step in prioritising action and developing adaptation pathways. NSW local government has prioritised this with over 82% of councils having conducted a climate change risk assessment or vulnerability study. LGNSW endorses this approach for prioritising climate impacts.

Other relevant factors to be considered in a national climate change risk assessment include cumulative impacts such as multiple or overlapping climate events and interdependencies between systems.

Part 3 – National adaptation plan

A national adaptation plan should look at all sectors of the economy and develop collaborative solutions. Local governments and their communities are on the frontline when dealing with the risks and impacts of climate change. As climate change impacts will be experienced at regional and local levels, councils may be best placed to manage these risks. Local government, working in partnership with state, territory and federal governments, can deliver highly effective climate change projects that reduce carbon emissions and adapt to a changing climate.

Recommendation 1: LGNSW recommends a collaborative approach in addressing climate change risks working with other levels of government, industry and the community.

Part 4 – Emissions reduction target

A resolution of the 2018 LGNSW annual conference endorsed a net-zero emission by 2050 consistent with the Paris Agreement and the target in this Bill. NSW local government wants ambitious but realistic policies and practices that promote council, community, industry and government commitment to renewable energy, energy conservation and energy efficiency.

Division 2—Emissions reduction plans

LGNSW supports a multi-sector strategy to meet emissions targets. Measures to reduce emissions should come from all sectors of the economy including energy generation, mining, transport, waste, construction, buildings and agriculture. NSW councils are asking for a polluter pays market mechanism such as an emissions intensity scheme rather than financing emissions reduction through limited public funds.

Recommendation 2: LGNSW recommends an integrated approach to mitigation and adaptation policies to boost their efficacy and avoid inconsistencies and conflict.

Conclusion

Climate change poses significant disruption to our wellbeing, economy and to the natural environment. It is imperative that the Australian Government takes urgent action to address the climate emergency. Local government is a willing partner to collaborate on climate change risk assessments, adaptation pathways and in developing emission reduction strategies, especially those touching on the built environment and waste management.

Councils and communities are ready to step up to tackle climate change in a way that can stimulate economic growth and gain efficiencies in the management of their assets. Many councils have already responded to the climate change challenge by adopting proactive strategies to reduce emissions and to adapt to unavoidable climate change impacts through climate change risk assessments and adaptation plans. For other, less prepared councils, particularly smaller councils in regional areas, financial assistance may also be needed to undertake this planning.

Having identified potential solutions to the challenges, councils will need additional help to implement local projects. Implementation of these projects could have the added benefit of reducing the need for disaster recovery funding.

NSW local government has identified that shifting policy settings are a barrier to local climate change action. Businesses also need confidence that emissions reduction policies and the mechanisms to achieve them are consistent with Australia's international commitments and will not change drastically in the future. There is strong public support for climate change action and bipartisan agreement on climate policy is essential so that other levels of government, industry, and the market can make informed decisions around investment in emissions reductions and manage climate risks with an increased level of certainty.

For further information in relation to this submission, please contact [REDACTED], Senior Policy Officer - Environment on [REDACTED]