
2023 CLIMATE SUMMIT**S004-T00019**

Responsible Officer: Alison Worthington - Councillor

Attachments: Nil

Community Goal: 5 Our engaged community with progressive leadership

Community Strategy: 5.2 Proactive, responsive and strategic leadership

Delivery Program Link: 5.2.1 Be proactive leaders with a focus on 'community better'

Operational Plan Link: 5.2.1.4 Provide professional development opportunities for Councillors

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2023 I attended the Cities Power Partnership Climate Summit for Local Government. The Cities Power Partnership is a free national program created by the Climate Council that celebrates and accelerates the pollution reduction and clean energy successes of local government in Australia. This sums up one of the big themes of the conference - Many Hands Make Light Work, and the 2023 report, *Many Hands Make Light work: Connecting governments to accelerate climate action*, outlines a new approach to climate governance (Multilevel governance) in Australia that can empower all levels of government, especially councils, to fulfill their ambitions on climate change, and to genuinely contribute to Australia's national climate policy.

<https://citiespowerpartnership.org.au/many-hands-make-light-work-connecting-governments-to-accelerate-climate-action/>

BACKGROUND

Report Key findings:

1. Councils and communities are on the frontline of climate impacts and solutions,
2. Local climate action is stunted by the lack of coordinated state and federal climate policies,
3. To ratchet up local climate action across Australia, barriers councils face must first be addressed,
4. Australia's Paris Climate Commitments make little reference to local governments and significant scope exists to integrate local climate action into it,
5. The federal government can spearhead a Multilevel Governance approach to climate policy, and give those on the frontlines a seat at the table.

Australian Governments Working Together

In a panel discussion titled *Australian Governments Working Together for Strong Climate Action* Jo Evans, Deputy Secretary of Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water spoke to the need for the Federal government to implement enabling systems including standards for claims of carbon neutrality and energy efficiency, to ensure accuracy in how we measure and report on work on emissions reduction at all levels.

In the Q&A session following, the matter of social licence for large renewables installations, additional transmission lines and new minerals for renewables projects, particularly in regional areas, was addressed. Striking the balance between the urgent need for energy transition and biodiversity and amenity concerns in the affected localities has put significant pressure on local government to ensure their communities are genuinely engaged in project design.

2023 CLIMATE SUMMIT**S004-T00019**

ALGA President, Councillor Linda Scott warned that regions feeling the pressure of energy transition risk having their communities marginalised and facing attack from Sovereign Citizen and extremist groups. Keeping our residents informed and involved, and social cohesion overall, are more important than ever at local government level. A clear point was made that not as much social licence building is needed for small scale community energy projects.

Councils are calling for better support from industry and other levels of government to bring their communities along with the energy transition. We heard examples of communities from East Gippsland to Gladstone who are collaborating to have a seat at the table where these new minerals and energy generation projects and expansions are underway, and forging better outcomes for their residents. This again went to the matter of consistent national standards on matters like assuring that minerals processed now will be long-lived AND retrievable at the end of product use, and ensuring that this and the source of energy for construction and extraction are considered at the time of the granting of consent.

A hot topic of the conference was the Federal Government's Community Energy Upgrades Fund open from January to April 2024, announced following strong advocacy and leadership by the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA). Councillor Linda Scott told us that at only \$100 million initially, the take home message was for councils to aim high and oversubscribe to the fund so that the Feds know councils are ready to tackle energy efficiency and pursue energy upgrades and bill savings for community facilities like local pools, sporting clubs and community centres, but will need strong support for that.

Energy Transformation

In Gladstone, a Central QLD industrial powerhouse, Mayor Mat Burnett has exemplified bringing the community along in the transition. By inviting facilitation by The Next Economy ([Projects – The Next Economy](#)) for powerful community conversations, Gladstone is now in a strong position to bargain with big industry and make known the community's intentions to lead in the transition while caring for their people. He told a story of their strong anti-FIFO (Fly in, Fly out) message and resistance to companies bringing their logos on water bottles and rugby jerseys in place of genuine investment in the people and the economy of their region. The region has struggled through sudden closures of major industries due to global forces before and is not willing to be vulnerable to that again.

In Mat's own words: 'We are staying - coal is not. I love my community more than I love xyz industry'.

The Next Economy is a not-for-profit economic development agency that works with regions across Australia to explore economic opportunities that are climate safe and regenerative of natural systems and communities.

Jacqui Bell from The Next Economy told us they have since worked with communities in transition in Gippsland and seen them move from perceiving transition as a threat to seeing it as an opportunity. Tony Wolfe and Councillor Carolyn Crossley (Wellington Shire) from the Gippsland Climate Change Network also spoke in sessions at the conference about leading in times of uncertainty, the pace of change in their region since the Gippsland Renewable Energy Zone and Gippsland Offshore Wind Zone were declared, and the opportunities their community are navigating in the move to a clean energy economy. With 37 proponents globally vying for the 5 project permits, the GCCN community is also hosting an annual Gippsland New Energy

2023 CLIMATE SUMMIT**S004-T00019**

Conference and focusing on building the workforce for this change, exploring jobs beyond the expected demand for technical and trades employment, understanding the need for teachers, trainers, community development workers etc.

Jacqui Bell also spoke of the opportunities this energy disruption brings in moving towards:

- energy democracy
- energy equity and
- energy justice

[GCCN Home - Gippsland Climate Change Network](#)

Electrify Everything

The conference had started with an EV Drive Day at the Melbourne Showgrounds, and attendees travelled there from the CBD conference venue in E-buses. On display and available for test drives were electric and hydrogen transport solutions for councils that are available for adoption right now. While people could test drive EV cars and other likely vehicles for council fleets, it was more about Electrifying Everything and asking 'Is your council getting electrify everything-ready?' We saw demonstrations of mowers, street sweepers and other replacement options for council operations. This told a really positive story of breaking up with petrol and diesel - these electric appliances reduce emissions, but they also have major advantages in terms of noise reduction, health and safety for the staff operating them, and lower maintenance and servicing requirements.

Risk and Accountability

The speakers program kicked off with a climate update from Professor Emeritus David Karoly and Greg Mullins, Former Commissioner of Fire and Rescue New South Wales. Both serve as Councillors for The Climate Council.

Prof Karoly came with the scary news: AUSTRALIAN climate heating increase is greater than the global 1.2 deg, now at 1.4 degrees (speaking in terms of the decadal averages). This is due to our land mass and land warming, which sits 50% higher than global average and has serious implications for rising heat mortality.

Greg Mullins' presentation featured his own images from volunteering with the RFS in Batemans Bay in December 2019. He spoke of adaptation we are yet to come to terms with in Australia in response to increasing bushfire threat including hardening infrastructure, early warnings, retrofitting homes to Standards 3959 and raising that standard. He knows that as a nation we have to ask how we can fund that, especially when the immediate and urgent demand is for more housing to be built to address the housing crisis. Greg Mullins says the answer simply reprioritising: Ending the \$65 billion globally in fossil fuel subsidies, including \$11bn annually in the Australian economy, and putting that money towards safer homes and greater investment in evidence-based land management practices that will reduce the threats to human settlement and biodiversity loss.

The risk and accountability theme was covered in sessions addressing climate risk governance, and the challenge for councils addressing climate risk and liability with only small teams working on climate and sustainability.

2023 CLIMATE SUMMIT**S004-T00019**

Ryan Gale, Associate, Climate Risk Governance, Minter Ellison advised that good governance in this space is not outcomes based; it arises from having robust decision making, structures and strategy in place now. All councils must have updated risk assessments on:

- physical risks
- transitional risks

and scenario planning on 1.5, 2.0 and 3.0 degree global heating models for all projects.

Other discussions covered the impacts on communities of data in the Home Insurance Affordability Map, the about-to-be-released Resilient Building Council Home Self-assessment App and the highly anticipated release of the Office of National Intelligence report on National Security threats posed by climate change.

Crystal Fleming, Chief of Partnerships and Impact, Resilient Building Council added that investment in resilient buildings significantly reduces disaster costs and there were nods of agreement across the room from any who have seen the daunting waste and emissions consequences arising from clean up after climate-induced natural disaster events in their own communities.

Place-based solutions

The conference had plenty of examples of Victorian state and local government climate action - this is the state with the fastest decarbonising economy in Australia *because* they have traditionally benefited from a heavy reliance on Bass Strait Gas and brown coal. Victoria's groundbreaking Climate Change Act (2017), made it the first state to align with the Paris Agreement's net-zero emissions target by 2050.

There were also speakers from across the country including the General Manager of Kempsey Council and Mayor Amanda Findley of Shoalhaven City Council (SCC), 2 NSW councils like our own - very closely connected to the on-ground impacts of climate change through natural disasters.

(NOTE: SCC took home the conference Battler Award for Climate Resilient Shoalhaven and were finalists in the Innovation Award for their Recovery into Resilience project, an award taken out by the ACT Government for its Australian-First Household Electrification Digital Experience).

Case studies and presentations ranged from local renewables power generation in cities and the regions, to council pool facilities energy upgrades, household and small business energy upgrades, innovative neighbourhood transport emissions reduction programs and council-supported subsidy programs.

Solar Savers is a program, currently only operating in Victoria, to help councils administer subsidies in addition to state and federal subsidies for household solar installs and energy rebates. At a cost of around \$30,00 p.a for councils to administer or outsource, it provides resources to:

- build sustainability loans into rates instalment payments
- guarantee accredited installers - removing the risk for councils, and
- reduce costs and ensure accredited installers - making it easier for households to decide to act.

2023 CLIMATE SUMMIT**S004-T00019**

We saw case studies of local energy generation including community energy projects like the Totally Renewable Yackandandah (TRY). We heard that there are hurdles, but community-owned energy generation is possible and attendees were assured not to underestimate what is possible for local government in this space as a main actor or in support of community energy initiatives.

It's back to the future: all over the world electricity was originally developed and rolled out by local government and the first in Australia was in Tamworth!

Kristen McDonald from Rewiring Australia told us that "The lowest cost energy of the future will come from homes and communities, and then the grid. The grid is an important part of the future, but it should be recognised that likely the best outcome is for most energy to be generated and used locally."

A very local example came from Power Melbourne - a mid-size generation project using a network of community batteries to help the 80% of City of Melbourne residents in apartments, along with small businesses, who can't access solar and/or are priced out of Green Power options currently available from their energy retailers.

Many of the community power options discussed are set up as demonstration models as powerful good examples to encourage replication in other communities. This again had us asking if our own LGAs are getting electrify everything-ready by planning new subdivisions and redevelopments with provisions for community battery installations and supporting infrastructure for Virtual Power Plants now or in the near future.

It wasn't all about Victoria - the City of Mitcham, SA, won awards and lots of mentions for its Community Renewables Program. We heard from a representative of ShineHub, the company awarded the tender to assist the council to implement the 4-phase program. Council, with the community, is promoting renewable energy adoption, decentralising energy supply, and currently implementing community batteries and virtual power plants to tackle energy price rises, along with household energy upgrades and supporting EV infrastructure. ShineHub shared details about their free Council Toolkit for Community Solar Programs, developed in collaboration with City of Mitcham.

[Council Solar Programs Old - ShineHub](#)

Communications and right messaging

More resources for councils for supporting their residents in energy transition and other electrification initiatives were provided by Ironbark Sustainability, Renew and Merri-bek Council with their Electrify Everything: Communications Guide for Households:

<https://zerocarbonmerri-bek.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Electrify-Everything-Communications-Message-Guide-for-Households.pdf>

[Home - Getting off Gas Toolkit](#)

[Household Electrification Webinar for Australian Councils - Ironbark Sustainability](#)

Many of these resources are being shared and have options for councils to re-brand and tailor the messaging to their unique communities.

Research shows we have a way to go in building up from the low trust in information from councils and low trust in solar and other upgrade installers. The research also supports the

2023 CLIMATE SUMMIT**S004-T00019**

success built on using local stories on cost, health, and safety benefits from switching to all electric appliances and cleaner transport choices.

Whether in the remote regions or in the inner-city suburbs, the power of getting the messaging right and supporting behaviour change initiatives ranked as key themes through all these case studies. As an example, we reach more people by talking about reducing emissions as a co-benefit of electrification/ changing appliances for health or cost reasons, not a personal responsibility.

This came up strongly in sessions on...

Clean Transport

Sessions on clean transport initiatives - public and active transport, and EVs - were popular as they all seem to come back to car parks; a live issue across all councils.

Councils need to invest to ensure their staff have the knowledge and data to support councillors to make challenging decisions where parking spaces are repurposed to EV charging or active transport pathways and infrastructure.

We heard of communities setting ambitious clean transport targets and meeting them with great buy-in.

In Bendigo surveys of residents revealed the need for a transport revolution, which they have embedded in their 2030 Greater Bendigo Zero Emissions Roadmap, along with exploring the establishment of an Integrated Transport Planner position on staff.

They now have a community goal of 1/3 cars, 1/3 active transport and 1/3 electric transport and will transform walking and cycling infrastructure and bus and train services to prioritise active travel and public transport, facilitate transport choice and accelerate the transition to electric vehicles.

Merri-bek Council has taken a neighbourhood-scale approach to reducing transport emissions through its Ride and Stride program.

This incorporates a target of 80% of all trips to schools to be made via sustainable forms of transport; whether this be by foot, bike, scooter or public transport, by 2030. Starting with 2 pilot schools, the program is now operating at 11 schools, covering 3000 students.

In addressing the barriers to students getting to school using active transport, the program found that the hurdles analogy was key: not all need to be cleared; some are just best knocked down, and that each school community needs its own tailored solutions.

- The Open Streets program looks like a knock down to me - for some streets around a school, closing the street to cars during school drop off and pick up times was actually a solution to traffic congestion complaints (and a strategy already demonstrated successfully in some UK schools under the School Streets program).
- To address parents and carer's concerns around kids arriving safely at school under their own steam, a Tag On facility notifies them by email once their child has arrived and tagged on at the school gate.

2023 CLIMATE SUMMIT**S004-T00019**

- E-cargo bike hire - a 'try before you buy' for families who were transporting kids to school by car and want to try a low emissions alternative. If they love the bike, they can then choose to continue after the trial on a low cost, weekly subscription.

The Role of Australian Towns and Cities in global climate talks

There was strong representation at the conference from members of the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, the largest global network of local councils taking action on climate change. Many of these Mayors are also signatories to the Fossil Fuel Non-proliferation Treaty Initiative. This calls for a concrete, binding plan to end expansion of new coal, oil and gas projects and to manage a just global transition away from fossil fuels.



The Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation
Treaty Initiative

2023 CLIMATE SUMMIT

S004-T00019

fossilfuel treaty.org

Mayor Abby Binay - Mayor of Makati, Philippines presented along with Hobart Mayor Anna Reynolds and have both joined an advisory group to COP28 for November 2023.

The covenant of Mayors is an effective collaboration because cities often have more ambitious climate targets than nations, yet local government is often not referred to in global climate (or other) agreements!

The Covenant of Mayors collaboration report under a common framework, showing national governments that they can deliver on the climate commitments they have signed up to. These mayors play a key role in ensuring that national ambitions on climate action are scaled up faster than their federal governments have committed to.

CONCLUSION

The CPP is a great venture in collaboration between councils across Australia. There is a great willingness for councils leading new emissions reductions projects to document their efforts and share templates and learning resources with other councils. I recommend ESC supports attendance by councillors and staff at future Climate Summits hosted by the Cities Power Partnership.