

**TITLE: Draft Climate Change Policy - public consultation report back**

**Submitted By:** Sustainability and Environment

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**LINKAGE TO INTEGRATED PLANNING AND REPORTING FRAMEWORK:**

**Leaving a Legacy**

*Looking out for future generations*

1.1.4 Environmental Sustainability - To support Council, businesses and the community to achieve the best possible combination of environmental, social and economic outcomes.

**ROLE:**

LEADER - Council grows strong, transparent and visionary leadership promoting unity to make our Tweed community even better tomorrow than it is today.

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Community feedback in response to Council's draft Climate Change – Net Zero by 2030 Policy has generated constructive engagement and input.

The majority of the 110 submissions to Council's draft policy were in support of the adoption of the policy and the target to achieve net zero emissions from Council operations by 2030.

Those in support and against the policy requested more detail about climate impacts in the Tweed, more detail about actions and costings to achieve the policy objectives, and more opportunities to input into decision making.

Many contributors expressed interest in being more involved in future work to address climate change, including ideas such as a community panel and a community engagement plan.

Detailed measurement, monitoring, evaluation and reporting of climate related impact data and outcomes from Council's work was encouraged by contributors.

A revised Climate Change Management Policy is attached to this report, recommended for Council's adoption.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That Council adopts the Climate Change Management Policy and target to reach net zero emissions from Council operations by 2030.**

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. Communications Engagement report - Climate Change Policy
2. Submissions
3. Requested changes and Council's responses
4. Climate Change Management Policy

**COUNCIL IMPLICATIONS:**

**a. Legislation/Policy/Existing Strategic Plans**

The draft Climate Change Policy has been developed to map out the priority areas in which Council currently, and will certainly continue to work on in the future.

The policy aligns with Council's requirement under the Local Government Act 1993 section 8A to 'act fairly, ethically and without bias in the interests of the local community.'

The policy also consolidates a range of policies, strategies and programs that form the basis of Council's response to climate change:

Climate change adaptation:

- Risk management
- Emergency management
- Flood management
- Asset management
- Protecting Tweed's drinking water source
- Biodiversity conservation and enhancement
- Coastal protection
- Waterways management
- Vertebrate and invertebrate pest management
- Strategic land use and transport planning and infrastructure
- Development assessment
- Building and environmental health
- Parks and open space
- Community services and community development

Emissions reduction and carbon sequestration:

- Smart building and subdivision design
- Smart asset and infrastructure design
- Energy efficiency
- Use of renewable energy
- Resource recovery and waste reduction
- Transport fuel efficiency
- Active and public transport
- Wastewater treatment emissions management
- Landfill emissions management
- Estuary health and waterway management
- Tree planting and ecosystem health
- Sustainable agriculture and enhancing soil health.

## **b. Sustainability:**

### **i. Financial (Budget/Long Term Financial Plan/Whole of Life Cost):**

The stated target of zero emissions by 2030 will need to be costed and considered in the context of long term financial budget considerations in the development of an Action Plan.

Adoption of the policy will enable more detailed climate change risk assessment and control work to proactively address climate hazards.

### **ii. Environmental:**

Climate change will increase the pressure of droughts and bush fires on wildlife and the natural environment, compounding the impacts of other threats such as river bank erosion, loss of bushland, weeds, human disturbance and feral animals.

The environment of Tweed Shire is of international significance and is particularly vulnerable to climate change. Special attention needs to be given to the many species that will struggle to tolerate more extreme climate conditions.

Adoption of the policy will confirm climate change as a priority consideration for Council's management of flora, fauna and water resources.

Council's current and completed REAP energy efficiency and renewable energy projects have reduced Council's operational emissions by up to 3,500 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>-e per year, a 14% reduction compared to Council's 2016/2017 baseline.

If actions and advocacy was successful in achieving a 100% renewable electricity grid and improved vehicle emissions standards, at least 676,910 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>-e per annum would be avoided in line with Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recommendations to keep global average temperature rise below 1.5 degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels.

### **iii. Social:**

Embedding climate change responses into Council operations and advocating for action from others to make our community resilient to climate change are important social signals that create hope and demonstrate Council's commitment to a thriving community.

Supporting equitable access to low emissions opportunities, such as renewable power from the grid, is an important social consideration. Solar on homes, for example, only benefits those who own their own property and have capital, credit or the capacity to repay loans.

Current and future actions that protect and strengthen the resiliency of the Tweed community to climate related hazards benefit all of the Tweed community and economy.

Protecting and building economic, social and environmental capital for future generations is a key form of social benefit associated with climate change responses.

### **c. Legal Considerations:**

Not applicable.

Some of the key priorities in the policy may involve reviewing existing legal frameworks to identify barriers and opportunities for change to support proactive responses and resiliency to climate change.

Assessing and reporting on climate change risks is increasingly being litigated in terms of corporate decision-making and director responsibilities.

### **d. Risk Considerations:**

This policy seeks to acknowledge and respond to climate change as a significant operational and financial risk to Council.

A comprehensive climate change risk assessment for Tweed and Byron was completed in 2009 with grant funding from the Federal Government, but has not been updated since. A revised risk assessment is recommended as a key priority. This is a significant task that will need specialist expertise and stakeholder input.

### **e. Engagement/Communication:**

**Consult** - Actively seeking the community's views and exchanging information.

Attachment 1 provides more detail about communication and engagement activities during the exhibition of the draft policy.

Attachment 2 provides a copy of the detailed submissions received during the exhibition period.

Attachment 3 outlines contributors requested policy change recommendations and Council's response to each.

## **REPORT:**

### **Background**

The purpose of the Climate Change Policy is to acknowledge that our global climate is changing, and that in Tweed Shire the effects will impact Council operations, our community, our economy and our environment.

This Policy communicates Council's principles, goals and priorities in addressing climate change.

There is a substantial amount of work to be done across the organisation and community to allow detailed planning and prioritisation of mitigation and adaptation actions. It is considered essential that this policy map out the priority areas in which Council currently, and will certainly continue to work on in the future.

The draft Climate Change Policy was placed on public exhibition from 17 March to 18 May 2020 to generate community feedback and gauge support for Council's role and future action in both mitigation of, and adaptation to climate change.

Despite COVID-19 restrictions on the dedication of Council's communication channels for critical pandemic information, the draft Climate Change Policy was promoted via:

- Council's website
- Tweed Link
- Media release
- Social media
- Your Say Tweed project page: 1190 visits during the exhibition period
- Three e-newsletters sent to over 3000 Your Say Tweed subscribers
- 1,720 Environment & Sustainability e-newsletter subscribers received notification
- 1,484 Business e-newsletter subscribers received notification
- Emails to key business, and industry groups, resident and ratepayer groups, environment groups and State and Federal Government representatives.

Attachment 1 provides more detail about communication and engagement activities during the public exhibition period.

110 submissions were received (103 via Your Say Tweed, 7 via email): 65 in support, 13 in support with changes, 32 not in support. Detailed submissions are provided in Attachment 2.

### **Recurring themes**

There were several recurring themes from the submissions received:

- Contributors wanted more information about Tweed-specific impacts of climate change e.g. sea levels, temperature records, Rural Fire Service perspectives about Tweed bushfire risk and behaviour, comparative frequency and severity of Tweed storms and floods.
- More information was wanted about the sources of greenhouse gas emissions in the Tweed.

- More information was wanted about the cost of Council's net-zero target, what alternative uses these funds could otherwise contribute to and how residents could be involved in budget decision-making.
- Council's community engagement and advocacy to the State and Federal Governments is of critical importance to encourage them to create a coherent and scientifically based climate change policy.

### **Key messages – Support for the policy**

65 contributors support the draft Climate Change Policy as it is.

Their comments included:

- Support the preparation of a Climate Change Action Plan, zero emissions and waste reduction initiatives and suggest that these be given highest priority and allocated significant funding to achieve these goals.
- We are all in this together to minimize, mitigate, and be resilient to climate change.
- Deals with many varied aspects of climate change
- Local government is extremely important for Australia to improve its carbon emissions.
- I am happy, as a ratepayer, to see some of my resources allocated to positive actions by Council to redress the past failures of government at all levels.
- This is a fantastic time to pursue these initiatives with all the changes that have been so good for the environment that have come out of the responses to the pandemic.
- Vital to address Climate Change with a sound policy to cut greenhouse gas emissions together with a firm action plan based on expert evidence.
- The Tweed Shire is the site of a biodiversity hot spot with over one hundred threatened or endangered species. Our wildlife is an essential constituent of the natural environment and as such one of the pillars of the tourist industry in this area. These species will not survive if the climate change is not halted.
- When we fail the environment, we fail our livelihoods and those of generations to come.
- Incorporating modelling of Climate change, is of crucial relevance in approving new developmental areas that are in low lying areas close to rivers. And of course, caution with DA Approvals in close proximity to the sea due to predicted sea level rise, that could impact the many relatively new coastal developments along our coast.
- A survey based on Beyond Zero Emissions 10 years ago conducted in Uki had 98% support, and all of those respondents comments were: "Why aren't we implementing it right now?"
- From our perspective this is somewhat a delayed response and we remain willing to support any climate change action plans for the Fingal Community.
- It is the most important challenge facing the world
- Clearly outlines a sensible approach to achieve this at a local level. I was pleased to see that consideration of the cost involved in these actions has been included in the draft.
- The Tweed Shire Council is the only organisation that is in the position to and has the capability to take a lead in the management of climate change in this Council area on behalf of local industry, businesses and all communities.

13 submissions received support the draft Climate Change Policy with changes:

Their comments included:

- It is important that council supports a sustainable sugar cane industry.
- Drainage will become even more important with the inevitable sea level rise
- This may be a noble goal but is now the time to make such a tight timeline commitment?
- Make sure that if we are using renewable energy that is not actually having a bigger, worse impact than the traditional or legacy energy generation and storage practices. In other words, happy for renewable energy, as long as it decreases the carbon footprint.
- Wherever possible Council will aim to reach net zero emissions earlier than 2030
- It's a good start but needs more specific actions. The wording is soft.

## **Key messages – Do not support the policy**

32 submissions received did not support the draft Climate Change Policy, although 9 agreed with Council setting a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from its operations and 15 considered it was Very Important or Important for Council to be involved in adaptation.

Key messages included:

- Oceans are not rising. Climate change has always occurred and Global Warming is a hoax or a cycle.
- Please watch the latest Michael Moore movie, Planet of the Humans.
- The picture of coastal erosion accompanying the policy has long ago repaired, largely on its own.
- There should be NO blanket policy.
- All of us need to understand that Council's aspirations are just a "feel good", expensive exercise that will not achieve what you are dreaming of and at a huge cost to ratepayers.
- What are current (ie 2020) Net Emissions? How can we thoughtfully commit to a goal without knowing our starting point? Showing our residents what our current Net Emissions are would give a real sense of the challenge facing the shire.
- The NO clarification of measurement tool, there is no mention of costs to the region, there is no real mention of benefits
- We should care about Greenhouse emissions, so lets do it well, not just a group of sensationalised motherhood statements. Provide a real cost/benefit analysis based on professional numbers.
- Before any work at all is done towards this goal, it must be costed!
- The community must be able to debate each specific 'Greening' proposal to consider the opportunity cost of any proposed investment.
- With the COVID-19 costing the Tweed Shire millions of dollars, I don't think we should be putting higher cost on the Tweed Shire rate payers for at least the next 5 years.
- I support moving steadily towards more sustainable practices by our council, but this draft plan likely commits rate-payers to expensive environmental costs
- Local Government should focus on the core responsibilities assigned to it by Legislation.
- I do not believe the TSC has the Constitutional Governance responsibility to create or duplicate policy on this matter.
- Anything we do in Australia is futile and worse will just add expense (in this case to our rates). Global emissions know no geographic boundaries.
- Policy is not based on historic temperature, rainfall and tidal records. It appears to use models which have proven to be alarmist and exaggerated.
- The Council will not achieve net zero emissions if it takes into consideration the total life cycle of the means it is using to achieve this goal, including the mining and processing of the raw materials, manufacture and the safe disposal of used equipment.

## **Targets**

83 contributors agreed with Council setting a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from its operations. 61 of these agreed with the target in the draft policy for Council to reach net zero emissions from its operations by 2030.

Their comments included:

- This is an achievable figure and will show the broader community that it is possible to change the way that we live and the imprint we leave in our community and the greater earth.
- Yes, depending on the cost (if any) of achieving this: it does seem a short time-frame in which to reach this target without incurring considerable cost.
- Yes, if not sooner!!

22 contributors disagreed with setting a target.

Their comments included:

- Everyone just do their bit to be aware and do what they can
- Australia will have no effect on world emissions. It is a waste of ratepayers money. Why destroy the Tweed's and Australia's economy for no gain.
- There should be no targets set as there has not been any logical case put forward to support the assumptions made in preparing this draft policy, nor whether adoption of and implementation will make any measurable difference to the community of Tweed.
- I don't support any target until the ratepayers are given details of costing for all and any targets
- Do not get caught up in grand aspirational schemes that will not achieve what you have set out and end up costing all of us a lot of money with no tangible result.

A wide variety of alternative emissions reduction targets and years were proposed.

### **Importance of Council being involved in adaptation**

- 73 said it is very important
- 11 said it is important
- 3 said it is fairly important
- 8 said it is slightly important
- 7 contributors said it is not at all important.

### **Should Council be undertaking actions to reduce levels of greenhouse gas emissions?**

- 66 strongly agree
- 10 somewhat agree
- 1 agrees
- 7 somewhat disagree
- 14 strongly disagree
- 5 neither agree nor disagree

### **Amendments to the policy as a result of submissions**

Changes suggested by submitters and Council's response to each are outlined in Attachment 3.

In response to community submissions, the following changes to the policy have been (Attachment 4):

- Rename the policy: Climate Change Management Policy to reflect the full policy intent .
- Minor rewording to improve readability.
- Reference added to the range of policies, strategies and programs that form the basis of Council's existing response to climate change.
- Description of the different categories of emissions added.
- Reference added about where to find details about current emissions for Council and the community on Council's website.
- Reword Guiding Principle 2 to include the provision of comparative costs for beneficial opportunities to respond to climate change.
- Reframe objectives as Goals, as detailed targets are needed for objectives, and have not yet been set.
- Reword Priority 1 to reduce Council's contribution to climate change, including an independent review of Council's emissions sources, analysis and costed options to meet net zero emissions from Council's operations, and remove Priority 5.
- Reword Priority 4 to include a net zero emissions strategy for the Tweed Shire in the Climate Change Action Plan.
- Reword Priority 10 about advocacy and action with other agencies to address the impact of climate change on community health.
- Reword Priority 12 to relate to community waste.
- Definition of carbon sequestration added.

## **Changes to implementation as a result of submissions**

Implementation of this policy will focus on:

- Cost-effective approaches to reducing emissions
- Adapting services and infrastructure
- Working in partnership with the community and other sectors.

In response to suggestions, development of a Community Engagement Strategy and establishment of a Community Panel or similar will be included in the development of a Tweed Climate Change Action Plan.

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting of the implementation of the policy will be via the Council corporate reporting system.

## **Other points raised by contributors**

- The generation and storage of the renewable energy (including the mining, transport and production of generators and storage capacity) must demonstrate a net reduction in carbon footprint.
- The only thing Council should stop is water mining.
- Even MORE important is the scourge of plastic, being produced by the millions of tonnes and just building up globally, choking the environment. Countering THAT would be a more desirable policy.
- Camphor laurel policy: Too often you see camphor laurels cut down along riparian zones leaving no trees left at all and no shade for farm animals. This should be done progressively if there is no other shade, trees growing.
- It is imperative that the impacts of the animal agriculture industry is also included in the policy. And this should include any council outlets serving food such as the Brett St Café. It is more water-efficient to obtain calories, protein, and fat through crop products than through animal-derived products.
- Council's own reluctance to ban fireworks which not only terrify animals and some people as well as native species, but fireworks cause serious pollution and can potentially cause fires.

## **Conclusions**

There is a broad spread of opinion in the Tweed community about:

- Whether climate change is real
- Whether Council can effectively do anything about it
- How much responding to climate change will cost
- Whether we're doing enough
- How Council should use its influence over the community to respond to climate change

The majority of people who made a submission on Council's Climate Change Policy were in support of Council's work to respond to climate change by reducing emissions and adapt to climate hazards.

There was a general consensus from contributors that more detail is required about the effects of climate change in the Tweed, the costs and effectiveness of action to respond to climate change, and more opportunities are needed for the community to contribute to decision making on climate change related topics.

## **OPTIONS:**

That Council:



1. Does not adopt the policy.
2. Adopts the policy with the recommended changes.
3. Adopts the policy with other changes.
4. Reconsiders adoption of the policy pending a further report back on how Council's operations can have a net-zero effect on climate change through emissions reductions, carbon dioxide sequestration and offset purchase options, including costs and funding options.

#### **PREVIOUS COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS:**

At the Council Meeting held on 6 February 2020 a report on the Draft Climate Change Policy was resolved as follows:

*"that the Draft Climate Change Policy be placed on exhibition for a period of 60 days with the following changes:*

- *Add a subheading to the name of the Policy titled "Zero Emissions by 2030"*
- *Add in the Guiding Principles: The environment of the Tweed Shire is of international significance and particularly vulnerable to climate change. Special attention needs to be given to the many species at the extent of their range that will struggle to tolerate more extreme climatic conditions. Governments at all levels have an obligation to protect and enhance this global asset.*
- *In the Key Priorities section: Add after the 8th point "demonstrates sustainability to the broader community through Council's own development/construction/maintenance activities.*
- *Change order of point 5 regarding targets to bring it up to point 1.*
- *Point 13 Address the impacts of climate change in biodiversity conservation by increasing native forest cover and wildlife connectivity, and reducing ecosystem degradation across the Tweed Shire. Change to: Assess and address the impacts of climate change in biodiversity conservation by increasing native (delete - forest) vegetation cover and wildlife connectivity, and (delete - reducing ecosystem degradation) improving ecosystem health across the Tweed Shire.*
- *Point 15 Lobby the NSW Government to investigate alternative revenue sources Change to: Advocate to the NSW and Federal Government for improved legislation and funding to address climate change.*
- *Add a new point: Monitor and review Council's Investment Strategy and portfolio to avoid/minimise investments in financial organisations that support the fossil fuel industry where legislatively possible and economically viable.*
- *A communication and engagement plan be implemented to promote interest in, and submissions to, the Policy.*
- *Add in to page 9, context: Cities for Climate Protection Program In 1997 Tweed Shire Council joined the Cities for Climate Protection TM (CCPTM) Program, a voluntary initiative that assists local governments around the world to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in their municipality."*