

Name of policy:	Climate Change Policy		
Adoption by Council:		Minute number:	
Last review date:			
Review timeframe:	2 years		
Next scheduled review date:			
Related legislation:	<i>Clean Energy Act 2011</i> <i>Coastal Management Act 2016</i> <i>Local Government Act 1993</i>		
Associated policies/documents:	MidCoast Climate Change Strategy: Phase 1 MidCoast Climate Change Risk Assessment		
Responsible division:	Natural Systems		

Policy objective

This policy has been developed to articulate MidCoast Council's position and response to climate change. It defines Council's role in reducing its carbon emissions and adapting to the projected impacts of climate change and supporting the community to do the same.

Policy statement

MidCoast Council recognises a state of climate emergency exists, declaring a climate emergency in October 2019.

The policy provides a framework that brings together plans for sustained action to both manage and reduce our greenhouse emissions and to adapt our practices to become more resilient to the unavoidable impacts of climate change. A key objective of this policy is to demonstrate leadership by setting emission reduction and renewable energy targets for Council's operations.

MidCoast Council will also incorporate risk-based assessment of climate change impacts in its decision-making, processes and operations, and will develop partnerships and engage with local communities and industry bodies to adapt to these risks and manage these impacts collaboratively.

Coverage of the policy

Position	Directorate	Responsibility
Mayor	Council	To lead Councillors and the community in their understanding of the impacts of climate change and the need to mitigate and adapt to climate change
General Manager	Executive	To lead staff (either directly or through delegated authority) in their understanding of the impacts of climate change and to ensure appropriate organisational strategies and decision-making frameworks are in place to respond to climate change

Directors	All Directorates	To communicate the policy and to ensure that staff have the frameworks and strategies necessary to implement and comply with this policy
Council Leaders	All Directorates	To ensure that climate change is integrated into planning and decision-making and that staff adhere to the policy
All Council Staff	Council	To have an understanding and comply with this policy

Strategic Plan link

The development of the draft Climate Change Policy and Strategy aligns with Council's Community Strategic Plan, specifically:

Strategy 8.2: Proactively manage our resource consumption:

8.2.1	Develop and implement a Sustainability Action Plan for Council assets and operations that focuses on minimising consumption.	Establish targets and develop a plan to reduce emissions across Council's operations.
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Policy content

Over the last 12-18 months, the MidCoast region has experienced firsthand the disastrous effects of climate change including the worst bushfire season on record, which burnt a quarter of the LGA and resulted in the significant loss of biodiversity, life and property; a crippling drought including the hottest day on record; an increase in the number of intense storm events resulting in coastal erosion and localised flooding; and a massive reduction in annual rainfall leading to the introduction of Level 4 (Severe) water restrictions for the very first time. Since 2009, the MidCoast LGA has also had 23 natural disaster declarations; the second worst affected council area in NSW (NSW Office of Emergency Management, 2020).

In declaring a state of climate emergency, Council affirmed that urgent action is required by all levels of government, including local councils, to avert a climate crisis by reducing our carbon emissions and helping our communities adapt to the impacts of climate change.

In March 2020 the NSW Government released its Net Zero Plan Stage 1: 2020-2030, which lays the foundation for NSW's action on climate change and its goal to reach net zero emissions by 2050.

MidCoast Council will achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions and 100% renewable energy for its operations by 2040, by implementing actions to reduce its emissions and offsetting those emissions that can't be mitigated by investing in renewable energy and local carbon sequestration initiatives such as wetland restoration, where feasible.

Council will use its influence to lead and support the community to reduce its own emissions, which encompasses action around strategic planning, education and capacity building, incentives and financial support, advocacy and collaboration, infrastructure development and land use planning.

Council will also plan and implement measures to increase the resilience of Council's assets and operations and to help the MidCoast community adapt to the impacts of climate change, in particular to the increased inundation of low-lying areas as a result of sea level rise, accelerated coastal erosion, and the reduction in annual rainfall, stream flow and water supply.

Guiding Principles

MidCoast Council's Climate Change Policy and future actions will be guided by the following:

- Council will adopt a precautionary-principled response to climate change, by taking urgent action in line with its June 2019 resolution and subsequent climate emergency declaration, to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change over the long term.
- Council will adopt and implement an evidence-based and risk-informed approach to assessing climate change impacts and responses in its operations.
- Council will reduce the emissions from its operations and ensure its assets and services are resilient to the impacts of climate change by adopting adaptation measures.
- Council will integrate economic, social and environmental factors, as well as good governance into its decision-making processes that deal with its response to climate change.
- Climate change planning will be incorporated into Council's Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework.
- Council will adopt a proactive and collaborative process to inform, educate and work with the community, business and other levels of government about our climate change mitigation and adaptation approach.
- Council recognises that the risks of climate change and the adaptation responses vary across the region, and collaboration and planning to make communities and environments more resilient will reflect this.
- Responding locally to climate change is a responsibility shared by Council, the community and business, and significant reductions in regional emissions will only occur if all stakeholders work together.
- Identifying and developing climate change finance and investment opportunities in partnership with the community will be a key element of Council's approach.

Implementation

MidCoast Council will implement this Climate Change Policy by:

- Developing a Climate Change Mitigation Plan – to invest in cost-effective renewable energy, efficiency measures and set emission reduction targets for all Council sectors.
- Developing a Climate Change Adaptation Plan – to integrate climate change risk management into coastal management programs, floodplain risk management plans, and land use planning so we are more resilient to the impacts of climate change.
- Budgeting and resourcing climate change mitigation and adaptation action through Council's Operational Plan, and for each term of Council through its Delivery Program.
- Implementing approved plans and reviewing these plans at regular intervals and updating them to reflect changing climatic conditions and priorities.
- Developing and updating Council's services that educate, inform, incentivise and recognise local community and business efforts to reduce their emissions and adapt to climate change.
- Collaborating with community groups, business groups, State Government, neighbouring councils and the wider community to increase understanding, advocate for new legislation, and accelerate implementation of climate change responses.

Definitions

Climate Change	a change in global or regional climate patterns, in particular a change apparent from the mid to late 20th century onwards and attributed largely to the increased levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide produced by the use of fossil fuels.
Greenhouse gas emissions	any gaseous compound in the atmosphere that is capable of absorbing infrared radiation, thereby trapping and holding heat in the atmosphere.
Climate emergency	a situation in which urgent action is required to reduce or halt climate change and avoid potentially irreversible environmental damage resulting from it.
Net zero emissions	when human-caused GHG emissions are balanced out by removing GHGs from the atmosphere. Firstly, human-caused emissions should be reduced as close to zero as possible. Any remaining GHGs would be balanced with an equivalent amount of carbon removal, such as reforestation.
Climate risk assessment	can help organisations identify their climate change related risks or to test their existing risk management strategies under climate change and therefore identify areas where new strategies are needed.
Climate change mitigation	refers to efforts to reduce or prevent emission of greenhouse gases. Mitigation can mean using new technologies and renewable energies, making older equipment more energy efficient, or changing management practices or consumer behaviour.
Climate change adaptation	the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects.
Carbon sequestration	describes long-term storage of carbon dioxide or other forms of carbon to either mitigate or defer global warming and avoid dangerous climate change.
Precautionary principle	the precautionary principle requires that, if there is a strong suspicion that a certain activity may have environmentally harmful consequences, it is better to control that activity now rather than to wait for incontrovertible scientific evidence.

References and related documents

Plans that inform Council's responses to mitigate and adapt to climate change include:

- Community Strategic Plan: MidCoast 2030 – Shared vision, shared responsibility
- Local Environmental Plans (LEPs) for the Great Lakes, Greater Taree and Gloucester
- Hunter Regional Plan 2036
- NSW Government Net Zero Plan Stage 1: 2020–2030
- AdaptNSW Integrated Regional Vulnerability Assessment for the NSW North Coast
- MidCoast Council Community Emissions Profile Report (Ironbark, 2018)
- Statewide Mutual Program Climate Change Risk Assessment MidCoast Council (June 2020)
- Draft MidCoast Climate Change Strategy – Phase 1 (December 2020)

Responsible officer (position)

Manager Natural Systems

Attachments

Nil