

CLIMATE CHANGE RESPONSE PLAN

Creating a community roadmap

Stakeholder Bulletin #2
September 2020



TACKLING THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY TOGETHER

Through its Sustainability Framework in 2020, the City of Greater Geelong (the City) recognised that climate change is a global emergency. Responding to this global emergency is everyone's responsibility - government, the community, businesses, and individuals. We are all part of the region's carbon footprint, and we are all impacted by climate risks.

What matters now is accepting the situation and taking positive action, doing something personally and collectively to transition to 'Become a zero-emission, climate-ready city region'¹. The City acknowledges that it has a significant role in supporting an acceleration of the municipal-wide collaborative response.

To meet this challenge, the City has begun engaging the community in the development of a municipality-wide Climate Change Response Plan (CCRP). The aims of this engagement process are:

- to build a common understanding of the challenge, both for mitigation and adaptation
- involve the community in assessing the collective capacity to act and how to leverage existing efforts
- set short, medium, and long-term targets
- identify and co-design comprehensive and integrated actions and set priorities
- create a platform for shared responsibility and commitment to action.



¹ COGG Environment Strategy, Sept 2020

WHO WE HAVE TALKED TO SO FAR

This Bulletin #2 presents a summary of insights from a series of community stakeholder discussions conducted during August and September 2020. This round of engagement was the first step in the CCRP development process.

The City conducted online discussions with 24 community and business groups and several government agencies, involving over 50 people.

These stakeholders were identified as potential 'community climate response enablers' and represent the innovators and early adopters in the regional climate emergency response.

The people we spoke to represent a committed and passionate cohort of the municipal community. They contribute their time, expertise and energy towards climate action and environmental sustainability, many in entirely voluntary capacities.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Consequently, most of the participants in the discussions have strong feelings about climate change. Some have been confronted with the frightening implications of the threats posed to their families, communities, and the planet, whilst others expressed growing frustration with inaction by leaders (at all levels).

There is an overwhelming sense of urgency, with many groups pointing to the 2018 IPCC report which indicates we have only until 2030 to reach an emissions target that keeps global warming to less than 1.5C². Many biodiversity interest groups highlighted the clear and present danger to vulnerable remnant native habitats and species, so critical to the region's identity and resilience.

Despite these challenges, people are continuing to act, advocate and support others to act through their outreach programs and activities. They share a strong sense of

² IPCC, 2018: Summary for Policymakers. Global Warming of 1.5°C

More than anything, they desire to see and participate in a quantum shift in societal norms to build the scale of change necessary to address the climate emergency, be that reducing emissions or managing climate risks. Whilst many have in the past found themselves as activists on climate action, all recognise the need for a unified collaborative approach if a broad change is to be achieved.



An overwhelming message from participants was the urgent need for the City to develop clear, science-based targets for the municipality for the short and medium-term (5-10 years). Targets are needed both for reducing emissions and for critical areas at risk of climate impacts, especially natural biodiversity assets and vulnerable groups in society.

- provide locally relevant targets, which can help mobilise community buy-in and a sense of empowerment by individuals
- convey the language of the emergency in clear terms, state the 'call to act now'; and 'create the space' for others to join in
- raise awareness about climate change and help more people talk about it and what they can do
- only the City has the municipal-wide remit to set such targets - the community is more likely to respond

In addition to clear and strong municipal targets, many participants raised the need for an evidence-based approach to tackling climate emissions. Fundamental to this process is assessing and analysing the community's emission footprint and existing conditions across the

Positive stories show that there are many other benefits associated with climate action, including a healthier environment, strong community connection, better health and wellbeing and a feeling of satisfaction that we are part of the solution. Accessible case studies help to recognise efforts across the community and develop a pool of climate action ‘champions’, an essential tool in behavioural change.

The scale and distributed nature of the climate emergency mean that many players are and will be involved. More substantial progress at the municipal scale is likely to be

made where solutions span multiple agents, working across sectors.

There was a strong desire for the City to facilitate a more collaborative and integrated approach. This could help bring various sectors together and unlock new opportunities to leverage existing capabilities and establish a regional knowledge base that highlights the skills and expertise available locally.

Governance and accountability

Many participants highlighted the need for strong governance to ensure support, commitment, and accountability, improve coordination of distributed effort and enhance synergies.

Given the scale and scope of the community's role in the climate emergency, several participants proposed a new form of governance model, one where the City and the community take shared responsibility and a degree of co-management for development and implementation of the Plan. A precursor to such a model could be establishing a community consultative group to guide the development and implementation of the Plan.

Containing the carbon footprint of an expanding city

Participants highlighted the importance of residential building energy as a significant source of community emissions. Whilst participants recognise various efforts to convince existing householders to reduce energy and switch to renewables; they highlight the opportunity to influence future emissions through vital urban planning that sets a new benchmark for household energy use. Without such controls, the region's residential carbon footprint is expected to increase.



Acknowledge the climate, health and nature link

Many participants, especially those representing the public health sector, emphasised the growing awareness of climate risks to public health and wellbeing, both directly and indirectly. This link also extends to a growing

recognition of the positive link between access to nature and human health, both physical and mental.

As natural places and green public open space is put at risk by climate change (particularly in urban areas), community physical and mental health could be affected, particularly vulnerable groups. The important connection between people and nature has been highlighted during the COVID19 shutdown and emphasises the importance of placing a higher value on remaining natural assets.



Businesses are ready to act but need support

Business, in general, strives to be sustainable and they are an essential part of the climate solution in the region. Many business people understand the global megatrends of a shift towards low carbon economies. Whilst there may be general support for climate action, the current economic situation may make it difficult for a business to act without support. Businesses are people with families and aspirations, but they need to be emotionally connected to make a change. Communication will be important and we will need community ambassadors who are able to inform and engage.

Consumption levels and patterns

The rate of increase in our region's emissions is a function of both the population growth and also how we live. Emissions by the community can be attributed mainly to building energy use, industry, transport and waste. Participants emphasised the need to take a holistic perspective to climate action, that seeks to promote sustainable consumption behaviours at home, at work and play.

A significant gap in this regard is the municipality's strong car dependency which makes personal transport a significant source of municipal community emissions. Yet several participants noted that this area was often overlooked in the climate agenda. The need for greater emphasis on electric vehicle uptake, active travel pathways and effective public transport networks was a significant concern.

Supporting the switch to renewables

Switching to renewable energy is now a much more viable option given technological advancements and cost reductions. Some participants highlighted the roles they can play to help reduce energy emissions from non-residential buildings such as the aged care sector, schools, factories and businesses. Community-backed renewable energy schemes and microgrids could help these building owners switch to renewable sources, and batteries offer a way to store and trade excess energy.



Promoting land stewardship in 'drawdown.'

All participants associated with biodiversity conservation or land stewardship emphasised the potential for proactive natural resource management and enhancement, as opportunities to help with the 'drawdown of carbon' within the municipality. With climate pressures already causing impacts on vulnerable areas including coastal zones and low-lying areas, greater support to private landowners could help set aside valuable natural areas which can be locally recognised carbon sinks.

Increasing climate advocacy

Most participants highlighted the need for the City to be an active advocate for climate action, both within the region and upwards to leaders at the state and national levels. It requires political change, and the community is crying out for leaders who will speak up and influence the discussion. Whilst community groups can advocate for action at the local and municipal level; the region needs regional advocates who can speak to politicians, opinion leaders and key decision-makers.

Embedding climate action in decisions

Despite the Sustainability Framework, many participants are concerned that there is a lack of formal direction for the City to consider climate action in decision making. Some high-level decisions appear to be contrary to climate agendas. In contrast, others are made at the wrong time or too late in the decision-making processes to have any significant effect. Given the role the City plays in setting the strategic directions for the region and the importance of climate change as a critical external driver, participants emphasised

the need for embedding climate action formally in all strategic documents and decisions.

Funding and resourcing

A significant barrier noted by many participants is a lack of funding to support Council and community climate action efforts. In practice, climate action will be a complicated endeavour of both voluntary efforts, complemented where possible by formal funding through program resources, grants and incentives.

The collective resources do not currently meet the scale of the challenges, with most action reliant on voluntary efforts. Given that many of these efforts are relatively small scale, it is essential to secure additional resources that can drive the step changes necessary to meet the challenge.

Whilst it is possible to value add to existing efforts, community groups will need support if they are expected to be part of the broader effort to meet new expectations.

Given the limited funding available within the municipal budget and competition for funding, participants emphasise the need for genuine commitment through dedicated funding. The additional incremental costs of adequate climate action resourcing are expected to be offset by the likely benefits to the City, including support, goodwill, community cohesion and improved community resilience.

NEXT STEPS

Late October 2020

A consultation report will be distributed to community groups who participated in initial engagement sessions. Feedback will be requested to ensure issues raised were accurately captured.

November – December 2020

Co-design engagement through a series of community workshops to inform development of the Plan.

HOW TO BECOME INVOLVED

In November a "Have Your Say" page dedicated to the Climate Change Response Plan will be available <https://yoursay.geelongaustralia.com.au/>. This will provide project details, key dates and a place to share your views to help shape the Plan.

THANK YOU

We would like to thank all the participants in the recent community stakeholder discussions and look forward to working with you in the next stages of the development of this Plan:

- 100% Clean Bellarine
- Active Geelong
- Australian Parents for Climate Action
- Barwon Coast Committee of Management
- Barwon Water
- Bellarine Bayside Committee of Management
- Bellarine Catchment Network
- Bellarine Landcare
- Centre for Climate Safety
- Corangamite CMA
- Deakin University
- DHHS
- Diversitat
- Friends of the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve
- Geelong Chamber of Commerce
- Geelong Environment Council
- Geelong Field Naturalists Club
- Geelong Sustainability
- Ocean Grove Coastcare
- Public Transport Users Association - Geelong
- Sport & Recreation Victoria
- Sustainability Victoria
- Transition Streets Geelong
- Trust for Nature

FURTHER INFORMATION

If you or someone in your organisation would like further information on the Climate Change Response Plan, please contact:

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