



Climate change adaptation in the Midlands

The need for climate action, and reflections on Council's contribution

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Sometimes it seems there is a blurred line between two recognised responses to climate change – that of adaptation, and that of action to reduce emissions. Adaptation, the measures adopted to adjust to and cope better with a changing world, is necessary with climate change and it will be a different experience for everybody, depending where you live and how the impacts of climate related events play out. But, adaptation isn't enough on its own. In fact adaptation can be used as a cop out to not make the harder choices of emissions reduction.

As climate change progresses and extremes become more common, the emotional, physical and mental toll will escalate to a point where life will become unbearable for some. Action to reduce emissions is necessary to minimise the impact of climate change and reduce the extent to which we are required to adapt – and let's remember, adapting for some means moving to somewhere completely different – for people without resources, this is a terrifying concept. Many people around the world are already faced with this dilemma. It's hard for us in the Midlands to imagine what it would be like to be rendered homeless, or even stateless, by the consequences of a warming climate, particularly sea level rise.

The prospect of losing everything to sea level rise is actually very real for some Tasmanians living in low lying areas such as Roches Beach, Lauderdale, Turners Beach, Snug and Hellyer to name but a few vulnerable communities. Insurance companies are abreast of the risks and are either refusing to insure some properties altogether or hiking premiums to unaffordable levels. People want to be bailed out or compensated when faced with losing their homes to an eroding foreshore – but who is going to do this and where will the resources come from when the scale of inundation and impact escalates? Homes rendered worthless and people on the move will be an increasing part of our future because sea level rise is currently on an exponential curve.

So this is where I propose that adaptation is not just about making ourselves more comfortable as conditions change, it needs to include action to reduce emissions. This is where everyone can contribute and play a role for the greater good. Adaptation perhaps has a more ‘selfish’ edge, whereas action a ‘selfless’ edge. The action options to engage with are increasing all the time. Regardless of government policy there is now unstoppable momentum away from fossil fuels and into renewable energy. Consumer demand and pressure is part of what is driving this change and more and more people are getting on board, playing their part being more self reliant and locally focused when it comes to energy usage and consumption.

This article provides an overview of what Southern Midlands Council is doing in regard to action on climate change – and specifically has a look at Council’s recently revised Climate Change Action Plan.

Council’s commitment to undertaking action on climate change is part of the Strategic Plan 2018-2027:

‘3.5.1 Implement strategies to address the issue of climate change in relation to its impact on Council’s corporate functions and on the Community.’

Southern Midlands Council has two plans that are specifically aimed at managing the risks and impacts of Climate Change:

- The Climate Change Action Plan details measures that may be taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. As a relatively large organisation, council has a significant responsibility and the capacity to make a difference.
- The Climate Change Adaptation Plan which details measures council can take to minimise the risks to council assets and the community due to climate change and associated extreme events, such as bushfire and flood.

The Climate Change Action Plan guides Council’s ongoing approach to climate change mitigation, the primary goal of which is to:

- continue efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions over which council has control;
- assist the community to reduce emissions where possible, i.e. play a leadership role; and
- collaborate on broader scale initiatives with other organisations.

Council’s Climate Change Action Plan was originally produced to identify energy efficiency projects within Council’s scope of influence and capacity with a view to reducing greenhouse gas emissions that Council is responsible for. The original Climate Change Action Plan was endorsed by Council over 10 years ago and since then the following actions have been achieved:

- energy auditing - monitoring electricity and fuel usage in order to assess where improvements may be made;
- adoption of an energy efficient vehicle policy;
- retrofitting the Oatlands Town Hall to improve energy efficiency;
- lighting upgrades at Oatlands and Kempton offices to reduce energy consumption;
- installation of a solar photovoltaic system at the Kempton offices and at the Oatlands depot;
- natural resource management e.g. tree planting (for capture and storage of carbon in trees) and regenerative agriculture (to promote capture and storage of carbon in soils); and
- community programs such as energy efficiency advice and seminars.

Council's updated Climate Change Action Plan 2020 has three main areas of focus:

1. energy efficiency projects inclusive of solar photovoltaics and electric/hybrid vehicle upgrades;
2. land care projects inclusive of tree planting and landscape protection options; and
3. waste management projects that are related to emission reduction.

Focus on the short term procurement of an electric vehicles is in recognition that:

- the technology of electric vehicles and chargers has improved;
- the range of electric vehicles has improved to the point that they are a viable option in more remote locations such as the Midlands; and
- the future of transport will involve increasing amounts of innovation due to the importance of minimising emissions.

Further to existing land care initiatives that already involve dissemination of trees to residents and grant funded projects to protect and enhance remnant native vegetation – the Plan proposes developing a program to establish trees at identified council or community sites primarily for the purpose of capturing carbon from the atmosphere.

The revised Plan has a more detailed focus on waste management and ways in which operations can be improved to reduce emissions. The Plan also encourages policy development in the area of 'procurement' and suggests there should be consideration of using more materials that are recycled, or part recycled. This may include use of crushed glass or crushed construction waste in road base, or procurement of products made from recycled plastics or wood-plastic composites.

Higher waste volumes collected at council's waste transfer stations equates to more frequent truck movements to transport the waste to landfill at Copping. These trucks are inefficient fuel users. In the case of the Oatlands site, each round trip required for collection and disposal is about 200 km. There are currently 21 truck trips made per fortnight to service council's three waste transfer stations. Hence, minimising and reducing waste has the potential to reduce emissions from waste transportation.

There is also the issue of encouraging re-use of materials. Efficient segregation of reusable materials at waste transfer stations is proposed and is a contribution council can make to greater resource use efficiency and indirect greenhouse gas emission reduction.

Approximately 60% of material (by weight) currently disposed of to landfill in Tasmania is organic material. Organic 'waste' is a broad term that comprises: garden clippings, pruned material, larger lopped material; light garden waste such as weeds and grass from lawn mowing; and kitchen waste such as fruit, vegetables and bread. Not only does this dense, and often heavy, material incur a disposal cost to council, it's rapid decomposition results in the release of greenhouse gases such as methane into the atmosphere.

Council endeavours to segregate as much of the coarse woody organic material as possible from the waste stream at its waste transfer stations. An efficient processing method into a useful product is proposed as an important step in the Plan.

Implementation of the Climate Change Action Plan will be undertaken through an annual meeting to determine priority actions, timeframes, costs and benefits, budgets and implementation approach for each financial year.

Implementation of the plan recognises that investment in emissions reduction projects has financial benefits with payback of upfront costs over time as efficiencies are realised. It is recognised that investment in renewable energy and emissions reduction projects has benefits that outweigh the upfront costs. That is, new technology saves in ongoing running costs of vehicles and infrastructure.

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