

# **CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLANNING WORKSHOP PACKAGE**

## **Abstract**

Local councils in NSW are increasingly seeking to prepare for the likely impacts from unavoidable climate change, particularly in the coastal zone. A strategic approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation helps enable a council to adequately address risks, budget for impacts, minimize disruption to council services and fulfill their duty of care to the community.

The Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW (the Associations) are supporting councils in effectively adapting to climate change through the Climate Change Workshop Package. The Package advocates that risk management principles underpin climate change action planning and that councils hold a series of facilitated workshops and meetings to plan a local climate change response. The Workshop Package includes technical guidance, risk assessment tools, PowerPoint presentations and templates. The modular format of the Package means councils can select relevant modules and tailor a program to suit their particular needs.

The Associations pilot tested the workshop package by partnering with four organisations: Clarence Valley Council; Bland Shire Council; The Hills Shire Council; and The WBC Strategic Alliance comprising Wellington, Blayney and Cabonne Councils and Central Tablelands Water. The testing phase assisted in improving and fine tuning the Package and helped the councils to become familiar with the various approaches to preparing climate change adaptation plans. The experiences of the pilot councils are likely to be of interest to other councils and organizations at various stages of planning a local climate change response. Clarence Valley Council used the Workshop Package together with Statewide Mutual's Risk Assessment Program, their Climate Change Advisory Committee and Climate Change Policy to assess and respond to numerous risks including sea level rise, coastal erosion and other coastal hazards.

The Workshop Package is available from the Associations' Climate Change Action Pack website. This project was funded by the NSW Environmental Trust.

## **Introduction**

The Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW (the Associations) represent the 152 local councils in NSW. This includes the coastal councils from Bega Valley Shire Council in the south to Byron Shire Council and Tweed Shire Council, areas of high growth rates, at the northernmost point of NSW. The Associations provide leadership, advocacy, specialist advice and services for Local Government and promote Local Government through the community and media. The Associations currently offer training, events and information resources covering climate change, health, natural resource management, sustainability, water and waste, among other issues.

Since 2006, the Associations have run a climate change capacity building program with funding from the NSW Government. The program is designed to assist councils with the challenge of mitigating and adapting to climate change. The program has benefited from input from a project Reference Group of professionals working in, or closely with, Local Government and feedback from various stakeholders. The Associations' climate change program has been successful in raising awareness and has reached in excess of 2500 people through various workshops, forums and communications materials. In addition over 4000 individuals have visited the Climate Change Action Pack website.

Most councils recognize climate change will impinge on Local Government operations and services, threatening disruptions and causing financial impacts as well as affecting community well being (DECCW, 2010). Climate change will affect most, if not all, business units of councils. This includes those sections accountable for land use planning to those responsible for social planning and staff members proactive in bushland management to staff members who respond to emergencies. Climate change will need to be considered by councils in all planning; policy formulation; education and engagement programs; and on-ground works. In coastal areas, planning, engineering and asset management staff will need to factor into their decision making the potential inundation of roads and infrastructure; destruction of boat ramps, seawalls and jetties and the reduction in capacity of storm water drains due to sea level rise and storm surge.

## **Progress by NSW councils**

NSW councils are increasingly taking action to address these issues and prepare for climate change impacts (DECCW, 2010; LGSA, 2006). This is clear from the results of surveys about Local Government responses to climate change (DECCW, 2010; LGSA, 2006). In 2006, the Associations conducted a Needs Analysis Survey to which 74% of NSW councils responded (LGSA, 2006). The survey showed that in 2006 councils had commonly included climate change in State of the Environment Reporting, followed the (former) ICLEI Cities for Climate Protection program, sought grants, developed policies and management plans and conducted workshops, among other, less widespread approaches (LGSA, 2006). Now, many councils are employing all of these initiatives and more. Several councils are collaborating with other stakeholders in their region, forming climate change community advisory committees and delivering sophisticated community engagement programs and demonstration projects for both mitigation and adaptation.

Initiatives to address climate change may be formalized in a newly created strategic climate change action plan or integrated into existing strategic plans. The formulation of adaptation actions is commonly based on a risk management approach after completing a climate change risk assessment. In 2006, when the Needs Analysis was undertaken, only 12% of the councils responding had completed a climate change risk assessment (LGSA, 2006). Now, an estimated 40% of NSW councils have completed a climate change risk assessment, particularly coastal councils. In South Australia (SA), over 50% of councils have completed climate change risk assessments (Local Government Association of South Australia, 2010), a higher percentage than NSW as SA has only 68 councils compared with the 152 in NSW. Most of the councils that have undertaken risk assessments in SA and NSW have done so with the Local Government Self Insurance

Scheme, which is Statewide Mutual in NSW. It is interesting to note that we are on par with local authorities in the United Kingdom (UK). In the UK, which has a legal framework for adaptation; around 40% of local authorities have undertaken comprehensive climate change risk assessments (UK Adaptation Sub-Committee, 2010).

A risk assessment is just one component of planning for climate change. A survey by DECCW in 2009-2010 asked 82 councils if they were planning for climate change and 82% of respondents were planning for climate change (DECCW, 2010). This equates to at least 44% of all NSW councils, but a figure of around 80% is likely to be representative for the whole of NSW given the multitude of initiatives that are included under the banner of planning for climate change. The survey also found that coastal councils were more likely to be planning for climate change than those located away from the coast. This may be related to another finding from the survey, that coastal councils were more likely to perceive they will experience a great deal of impact from climate change than inland councils (DECCW, 2010).

Councils are particularly concerned about sea level rise, flooding and storm events which can affect ecosystems, infrastructure and private property (DECCW, 2010). Other key concerns are impacts on major public infrastructure and reduced water supply and drought and increased demand for water (DECCW, 2010). Several councils are concerned about the risk of the cost of water increasing and the impact for their communities (DECCW, 2010). Concerns also relate to demand for emergency services, biodiversity loss, changes in land use, community well being and increased costs and responsibilities for council (DECCW, 2010). The survey by DECCW found that 77% of the 82 councils responding felt they were not very prepared for climate change (70%) or not prepared at all (7%) (DECCW, 2010). Only 23% of respondents identified as 'fairly prepared' and none claimed to be 'very prepared' (DECCW, 2010). Coastal councils generally reported being better prepared than inland councils. But none of the 82 councils surveyed claimed to be 'very prepared' (DECCW, 2010).

In order to be better prepared for the impacts of climate change, councils require more funding and resources to invest in climate change adaptation (DECCW, 2010). Twenty-two NSW councils have received funding from the Commonwealth Government through the Local Adaptation Pathways Program which has assisted them to start assessing risks and formulating adaptation actions. Local Government in NSW requires further support through such funding programs to assist the remaining councils to go beyond risk assessment devise adaptation strategies and to implement adaptation measures. For example, councils have expressed a need for funding to afford new infrastructure and protect existing assets.

Further information to assist decision making is another clear need heralded by Local Government in the DECCW survey. To inform planning for climate change, mapping, modeling, scenarios and data on projected socio-economic trends are critically needed. Councils are contending with the physical impacts of climate change in the context of socio-cultural change including population shifts, demographic change and changes to industries and lifestyles.

For many Local Government Areas (LGAs) the percentage of the population 65 years and older is expected to swell over the coming decades with potential implications for the local workforce and community services. Some councils are bearing in mind that

populations in smaller towns in the Local Government Area (LGA) may shrink as people shift to larger centers in the LGA or out of the LGA. Meanwhile, in many coastal councils the population will grow over the next 20 years at rates of 1-2% per annum. Eurobodalla Shire Council and Shoalhaven City Council are examples of LGAs with high growth rates. In the DECCW survey, coastal councils in particular were calling for data on population, mapping and modeling.

## **Climate Change Action Planning Workshop Package**

To support councils in strategically acting on climate change, the Associations have developed a Climate Change Action Planning Workshop Package. The Workshop Package was created for councils to use to facilitate workshops and meetings to prepare a climate change action plan. The Package suggests steps for holding workshops and meetings and offers practical tips, technical guidance, PowerPoint presentations, risk assessment tools, templates and details for facilitating group activities. The modular format of the Package means councils can select relevant modules and tailor a program to their particular needs.

The Workshop Package is based on the Australian Government guidelines, *Climate Change Impacts and Risk Management: A Guide for Business and Government* (Australian Greenhouse Office, 2006) and the *International Standard for Risk Management ISO3100:2009 Risk Management – Principles and Guidelines*. It also follows the principles of effective stakeholder engagement set out in the CSIRO paper by Gardner et al (2009). The Workshop Package advocates that the action planning processes should address uncertainty; and be systematic and structured. This allows for review and revision over time as new information becomes available and lessons are learnt from experience. The Workshop Package also suggests that workshops should be inclusive, involving decision makers at all levels of the organization and stakeholders as appropriate. An important element to this is considering human and cultural factors and recognising the capacity, beliefs and intentions of stakeholders that can contribute to or hinder progress.

The Workshop Package has also been designed based on feedback received from a project Reference Group, a focus group and pilot testing. The Associations pilot tested the Package by partnering with four organisations: Clarence Valley Council; Bland Shire Council; The Hills Shire Council; and The WBC Strategic Alliance comprising Wellington, Blayney and Cabonne Councils and Central Tablelands Water. After a call for expressions of interest to trial the Workshop Package, 14 applications were received from 16 councils and the four pilot organizations were selected from different NSW State Plan regions.

The Associations worked with one or two lead officers from each of these councils over nine months to prepare and deliver action planning workshops using the Workshop Package. The lead officers coordinating the action planning in the councils were predominantly from environment divisions but also included community development officers, a human resources manager and a media liaison officer. Staff from the Associations facilitated or co-facilitated the workshops at the councils in collaboration with the lead officers. The lead officers also had the critical task of building support for the action planning process from executive staff members. Each council established a

Working Group and Steering Committee and completed the first two modules of the Workshop Package which comprise an introduction to climate change and setting the context for a risk assessment. The councils identified relevant external stakeholders and began forging relationships for working together on climate change. Two councils also undertook risk assessments to begin prioritising risks as a basis for developing adaptation actions. The lead council officers found the Workshop Package to be logical, useful, of a high standard and worthwhile. They intend to continue using the Workshop Package with their Working Groups to formulate, implement and review climate change actions.

The Workshop Package was also well received by workshop participants. Participants in the workshops reported that they found the workshops to be thought-provoking and enjoyed the practical group work, group discussion and hearing other participants' view points. Many participants liked gaining a better understanding of climate change projections for their region and hearing experts talk about specific regional issues.

The risk assessment workshops were found to be somewhat tedious due to the repetitive nature of the risk assessment process. However, it was clear to participants that progress was being made. The challenge of working through a comprehensive climate change risk assessment was subject of a discussion at the recent Australian Security Research Centre's Adaptation Information Sharing Forum. Practitioners noted that 'climate change fatigue' can affect working parties as a result of recurring or lengthy climate change workshops. To combat this, one of the pilot councils decided to reduce the number and duration of the remaining risk assessment workshops and that subsequent risk assessment work would be completed in smaller groups focusing on individual work areas.

The planning process was most productive where the lead council officers possessed confidence, commitment, enthusiasm and skill in organizing and facilitating or co-facilitating workshops. For the lead council officers this process involved collating and presenting climate change information, building support from senior staff and coordinating a working group tasked with formulating climate change actions for council. Some of the lead officers were apprehensive about the amount of workshop facilitation required of them and in some instances requested the Associations wholly facilitate the workshops. In particular, council officers were concerned over their ability to present information about climate change, encourage staff members to attend and participate in the workshops and to manage potential problems associated with scepticism. Yet, the lead officers found that participants were more positive and engaged than they had anticipated. Workshops participants who verbally volunteered that they were 'sceptics' offered their views constructively and assisted to identify further information needs.

The Workshop Package provides guidance and tools for running workshops but the success of the action planning process does rely on the aptitude of the lead officers especially their understanding of the organizational context. During the pilot testing competing demands for staff time and issues affecting staff availability demonstrated the importance of having more than one lead officer actively involved in coordinating the action planning process. Ideally, lead council officers should have the time and willingness to learn, acquire and pass on information about climate change; be able to lead discussions, manage group dynamics and deliver outcomes from workshops; and be committed to coordinating the development of a climate change action plan, which may take several months. To build the skills and confidence of council officers to use the

Workshop Package, the Associations will demonstrate the use of the Workshop Package to groups of selected councils. The Associations will also form a community of practice of council officers considering or intending to use the Workshop Package along with those who have used the Package to deliver workshops.

### **Case Study: Clarence Valley Council**

Clarence Valley Council is in the Northern Rivers Region of NSW and is approximately 300km from Brisbane and some 600km north of Sydney (Clarence Valley Council, 2010). The area encompasses a diverse set of environmental features, cultures, traditions, communities and industries and for the last 15 years the Northern Rivers Region has recorded the fastest economic growth in the state (Clarence Valley Council, 2010). The LGA includes two of the fifteen coastal erosion 'hot spots' identified by the NSW Government and required to prepare coastal erosion emergency action plans. The 'hot spots' of Brooms Head and Woolli Beach have attracted media interest and community concern. Council is also aware of the risks of increased algal blooms, sea level rise, salt water infiltration and affects on wetlands in a changing climate.

Clarence Valley Council pilot tested the Climate Change Action Planning Workshop Package between November 2009 and June 2010. Council had previously recognized the need to develop a climate change action plan and viewed the Workshop Package as a useful tool for a systematic approach. The Clarence Valley community had noted the importance of addressing climate change impacts in future planning during consultation undertaken for Council's Strategic Plan. In the 2009/2010 financial year, Council established a Climate Change Advisory Committee for further community engagement on climate change and allocated \$20,000 for developing a local climate change action plan.

In November 2009, Council used the Workshop Package to commence the action planning process with a two day workshop which comprised an introduction to climate change, presentations by external stakeholders, a review of council's progress in mitigating emissions and brainstorming new mitigation actions. As Council had also applied to undertake Statewide Mutual's Climate Change Risk Assessment Program, it was planned that the two day workshop would provide a brief introduction to risk assessment to lead into Council's work with Statewide Mutual. Clarence Valley Council will now use the Workshop Package to distill and prioritise adaptation options using the multi-criteria analysis tool and to plan for the evaluation and review of actions.

The workshop participants already had a good level of awareness of climate change prior to the workshops. This may be testament to the success of previous climate change and sustainability initiatives implemented by council as well as the distribution of briefing material to workshop participants. A pre-workshop survey revealed that all 18 workshop participants claimed to know 'a little' or 'a fair bit' about climate change and all recognized that climate change will affect their service area of Council.

Importantly, workshop participants generally recognized the importance of action planning, were proactive and came to the workshop with several suggestions for potential actions. Comments on the pre-workshop survey included:

*"Up until recently did not really take any notice, but now have no doubt that we need to act now to ensure we are prepared for the future"*

*"I believe we do need to change and start to change now"*

*"We need to look at the way we operate and what we need to do to improve"*

This provided an excellent basis for action planning.

In May 2010, Clarence Valley Council adopted a Climate Change Policy that sets out Council's philosophy regarding climate change and, in general terms, its response. The policy is built on the principles of ecologically sustainable development and identifies: Council's role as a leader; the need to develop the resilience of Council and the community; the imperative of integrating mitigation and adaptation actions; and the need for regular review.

Strengths of Clarence Valley Council's approach to climate change action planning have included that it has drawn on existing initiatives, is multi-pronged and has been well coordinated. A motivated project team, working group and steering committee were convened early and utilized both new and established, effective communication processes (including existing reporting mechanisms and a purpose built email distribution list). Council had already formalized its commitment to act on climate change (through the NSW Mayors Agreement, participation in the ICLEI Cities for Climate Protection Program, various mitigation actions and several community workshops) and this provided a foundation of achievement to build upon and provided momentum for further action. For example, the results of the community workshops were presented at the action planning workshop. The teamwork and leadership skills of the key council officers involved has meant that staff members from various business units of Council have remained engaged in planning and delivering action on climate change. The project team was successful in securing internal funding for a part time climate change and sustainability officer to be appointed which will enable further progress.

## **Conclusion**

Councils across NSW are generally aware of the likely impacts of climate change for Local Government, the need to adapt and the benefits of being prepared. Councils are making use of the various opportunities and resources available to improve their knowledge and take action on climate change. However Local Government would benefit from further funding and high quality information and guidance to ensure they can adapt to climate change in an effective and timely manner.

The Local Government and Shires Associations' Climate Change Action Planning Workshop Package is a useful tool for action planning by Local Government. This was demonstrated by the pilot testing where the workshops were found to be thought provoking and a valuable basis for further discussion, research and planning for climate change. The Workshop Package and case studies about the experiences of the pilot councils in using the Package are available from the Associations' Climate Change Action Pack website.

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