

Climate Emergency Declaration

Frequently Asked Questions

On Tuesday April 2021, Council unanimously declared a Climate Emergency. The scientific consensus is clear that climate change is a real threat and requires urgent action from everyone to protect all life on the planet. This declaration highlights Council's recognition of this science, and its seriousness about mitigating the risks that climate change pose for the social, economic, and environmental prosperity of our community.

Following this declaration, Council requires the development of an inclusive Climate Change Action Plan that best represents our Shire and community. Therefore, Council requires your help to assist in setting mitigation, adaptation and resilience actions that address Climate Change in our region.

The following frequently asked questions will provide you with further information about what declaring a climate emergency means and providing insights from key stakeholders within our region.

What is the climate emergency?

Climate emergency is understood in two ways:

1. The climate emergency situation refers to significant changes to the world's climate caused by human activity. This aspect of the climate emergency is extensively documented. The science tells us that the earth has warmed, and is continuing to warm, and as a result we face serious consequences for weather systems, for human ability to produce food, and for all people and species.
2. The climate emergency response refers to a specific approach to tackling climate change. The response stresses the need to devise measures that try and stop human-caused global warming.

What does declaring a climate emergency mean?

It means we acknowledge that the current levels of global warming and projected future warming require urgent action. This action is needed by all levels of government.

However, we believe, as the closest tier of government to the community, we are well placed to deliver and support climate change mitigation actions.

What does Council need to do after declaring a climate emergency?

Our next steps would be developing a Climate Change Action Plan that prioritises our direction.

To do this, we'll work with our community to understand their priorities and ensure they are represented in our action plan.

Council has already endorsed the Sustainable Strathbogie 2030 plan which has much valuable information and will help us develop our action plan. You can read Sustainable Strathbogie 2030 on our [website](#).

We now need your help in setting mitigation, adaptation and resilience actions that best address Climate Change in our region. You can submit your climate actions and preference at www.share.strathbogie.vic.gov.au/climate-change-action-plan



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What do households have to do?

Nothing. Declaring a Climate Emergency means the actions and outputs sit firmly with our organisation. It's about determining what Council can do to reduce its carbon footprint and emissions.

Will declaring a Climate Emergency mean the Shire has greater access to funding/grants for mitigation initiatives?

While declaring a Climate Emergency doesn't give us priority to grants over those who have not, it shows we mean business. It shows we're taking the impact of Climate Change seriously and we want to take action.

Having Sustainable Strathbogie 2030 and a Climate Emergency Action Plan – means we can show we've done the thinking, we've engaged our community, and we're ready for action. This stands us in excellent stead to apply for external funding.

How is the Climate Emergency manifested in our Shire?

The emergency is manifested in our Shire in more severe and frequent extreme weather events, insecurity in our electricity supply.

Drought, and periods of low rainfall, increases in insurance policies and decreasing diversity of native flora and fauna. There are also serious implications for land use planning, infrastructure, transport, food and water security and human health.

Will declaring an emergency increase rates?

The act of declaring a Climate Emergency will not have a direct impact on rates. Rating decisions are made as part of the budgeting process.

Who else has declared a Climate Emergency?

In Australia 105 local governments have already declared a Climate Emergency. You can see the full list on the Climate Emergency Declaration [website](#).

What would change for ratepayers if we declare a Climate Emergency?

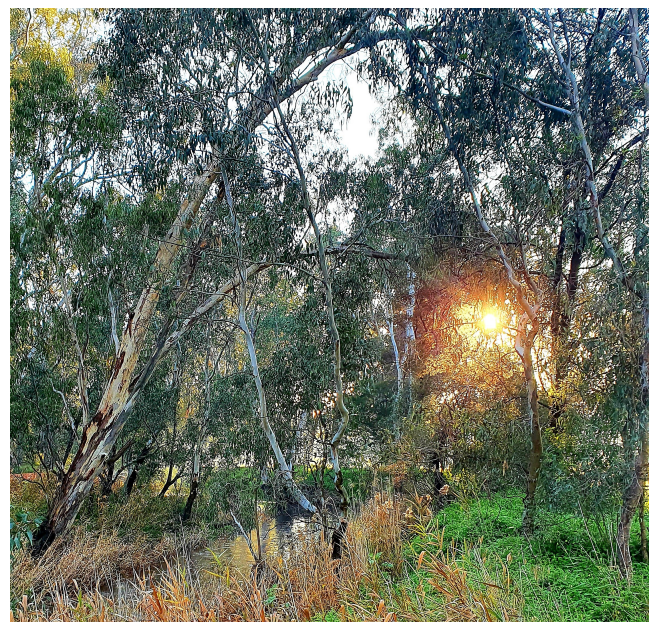
Declaring a Climate Emergency would mean Council is committed to reducing its emissions and helping our community adapt to the changing climate.

It would mean we take the impact of Climate Change into account when we're making decisions. Any specific actions we take will be outlined in the Climate Change Action Plan that we would develop with our community.

Will it mean insurance companies can lift their fees on home insurance?

Council declaring a climate emergency will not allow insurance companies to increase their prices in our Shire. In general insurance is a risk game based on the chance that your home may or may not be impacted by a disaster.

As severe weather events continue to increase in number then the number of properties that require an insurance payout will increase. This will then increase the cost across the board. For more information on how climate change is impacting insurance prices – we encourage you to read this [ABC news article](#).



Key Informant Interviews

Prof. Kate Auty - Professorial Fellow, University of Melbourne

Q.1 What are the major drivers for enhancing human induced Climate Change and has there been a shift in Government thinking around these impacts?

The Five C's: *Coal-Fired Power Stations, Cars, Cows, Computers and Communities* summarise the major areas of concern we face that impact Climate and require immediate attention.

The recent local experience of last summer's fire season in Australia and more recently with the flooding seen in North America and Europe, extreme weather events are occurring more frequently, with greater intensity, resulting in greater economic, environmental and social consequence.

Governments around the world are beginning to recognise that we need to act now on Climate Change, but here in Australia, we aren't collectively doing as well as we should.

At the local government level, there are many practical actions that can be implemented to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change.

Q.2 What do you see as the role for local government moving forward?

Local Government can play a major role in shaping the climate futures of their respective regions.

Some actions that Local Government can implement to address Climate Change include;

1. **Fleet Management:** transition to electric vehicles and plant,
2. **Procurement Policy:** emphasise and embed a circular economy approach to the procurement of goods and services
3. **Environment & Landscapes:** implement waster sensitive urban design and climate resilient vegetation in township planning and environmental management.

Post-COVID, Local Governments have the ability to transform their development trajectories and foster a more climate-focussed development path.

An example of this includes an *Active Travel* approach to Tourism development within the Strathbogie Shire. Active travel can produce both direct and in-direct economic, environmental and social benefits through emphasising pedestrian friendly walking and cycling routes, activities and events, reducing the need for local travel in a vehicle whilst encouraging active lifestyles.

Cam Klose – Campaign Director at Farmers for Climate Action

Q.1 Why is it important for farmers to play a key role in driving climate action?

Farmers are positioned at the forefront of a changing climate in Australia, as 51% of all Australia's landmass is attributed to farming.

Changes to climate and local conditions has and will continue to be a major disruptor to the livelihoods of farmers. Changes to farmer livelihoods will have a whole of society effect, as Australia relies on their primary producers to provide the materials and consumables required on a daily basis.

Farmers are already having to adapt to these changes, either through transitioning their farming practices, agricultural type and focus, or even relocating entire farms and business to other regions with a predicted more favourable climate.

Research shows that farmers are the most trusted voice on climate in Australia, as they represent the primary group experiencing the effects of climate change firsthand. These experiences provide powerful stories, where farmers have the ability to create substantial influence in both advocating for, and implementing actions that address Climate Change.

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Q.2 What are the key actions can farmers take to ensure their properties are contributing to a better climate future?

Agriculture makes up for approximately 14% of Australia's total carbon emissions. This is a significant figure, albeit in a different manner compared to more carbon-intensive activities such as transport and energy production (fossil fuels).

To ensure better climate futures for farmers on their own properties, the *Farmers for Climate Action* recommend;

1. Shifting on farm energy requirements to renewables,
2. Improve land management techniques through; carbon sequestration via alternate grazing methods, vegetation and soil management, and
3. Advocacy within their local communities

If you are a farmer within the Strathbogie Shire and wish to know how you could transition to more climate resilient practices, please visit the [Farmers for Climate Action website](#).

Jenny O'Connor – Mayor, Indigo Shire Council

Q.1 Why did Indigo Shire Council decide to declare a Climate Emergency?

The Climate Emergency was declared in Indigo Shire as a direct result of our community's deep concern with our climate future.

The overwhelming concern amongst our community lay in the belief that there is a clear lack of action and leadership at the Federal level, with some Members of Parliament even in denial that we are currently living in the midst of a climate emergency.

With that lack of leadership, our community, and us as a Council, have made the decision to fill that void and implement actions that best serve our local community through declaring a Climate Emergency.

Q.2 What actions has Council taken as a result of the Climate Emergency declaration, and what can Strathbogie Shire learn from Indigo Shire's experiences?

The first step of placing this declaration into action was the development of Indigo Shire's Climate Change Action Plan. The plan emphasizes six key areas;

1. **Council Plan**; embedding the Climate Emergency into the Council Plan, where all policy and strategy takes climate change into account.
2. **Reducing our Carbon Footprint**; assessing and implementing alternatives to business as usual, including fleet management and energy efficient lighting in Council property.
3. **Climate Change Culture**; instilling a culture that brings awareness to climate change with all new and existing staff
4. **Promote Environmentally Sustainable Development**; to protect the environmental whilst meeting current and future community needs
5. **Mobilise and Engage our Community**; become the enablers of community action on climate change
6. **Collaborate and Advocate**; focus on partnerships, knowledge and cost sharing

The overarching principle across all Council operations is to bring the economic, environmental and social costs related to living in a climate emergency to the fore of decision-making. Importantly, these actions are not to override all other processes when making decisions, nor should it compromise the integrity of good fiscal management.

What Strathbogie can learn from our Climate Emergency declaration is that the discourse on the role of local government needs to move beyond roads, rates and rubbish. We have the responsibility to act on the benefit of all ratepayers and the environment, to make decisions that will create and support the buffer from adverse climate effects that will affect our region and our community over the coming decades.

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Bronwyn Chapman – Goulburn Murray Climate Alliance

Q.1 What do you think is the biggest risk of not acting on Climate Change now?

The consequences of a '*do nothing*' approach globally is quite dire, but especially within our region.

The climate events we have experienced recently, such as the bushfires last season, will become more frequent and extreme. The fire season will begin earlier and continue longer, as our summer season will increase to last up to 5 months.

Relatedly, the longer, hotter, and drier summers will severely reduce water availability, exacerbating a range of consequences.

It is forecasted that by 2030, our region will witness a 20% decrease in water availability, falling a further 30% from that by 2050 if no action is taken now.

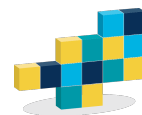
Q.2 If you could encourage everyone to do one thing to reduce their impact on the climate what would it be?

The next decade is of the utmost importance, as it is still possible to reduce the undesired effects of climate change if we act now.

One thing at an individual level to reduce their impact on climate change can be to address their own household energy consumption.

Sourcing your household's energy needs from renewable energy and renewable energy providers will reduce your ecological footprint drastically.

Transitioning toward highly efficient electric appliances from gas is a major step toward fulfilling this. Adopting new and emerging technologies, such as solar hot-water systems, has the ability to produce co-benefits; reducing household electricity bills by up to a third, whilst reducing environmental effects from the use of low carbon intensive energy.



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Sally Hayes-Burke – Councillor, Strathbogie Shire Council

Q.1 After the unanimous declaration of a Climate Emergency, what do the Councillors hope to achieve?

The Councillors hope to bring awareness to the issues surrounding climate change, and to make decisions that places the environment at the fore of all decision making.

Our aim is to drive actions that mitigate and adapt to climate change that will in turn build more resilient communities when faced with the effects of climate change such as; extreme temperatures, bushfires and flash flooding.

The Climate Emergency declaration is about transitioning Council's operations toward carbon neutrality, whilst assisting our community acclimatise, moderate and deal with climate change.

Q.2 With concern about this declaration amongst the community, why do you think it's important for Local Government act on Climate Change?

There was concern raised by members of our community regarding this decision. However, the notice of motion to declare a Climate Emergency was something that Councillors received a lot of support for in the community.

The Councillors firmly believe that they would be breaching their duty to ratepayers if a climate lens was not utilised on all decisions Council make.

Increasingly, Australians are looking to their local councils for action on climate change because serious action at a State or Federal level has been lacking. Local government has the ability to deliver the path of development that addresses the best outcomes for our climate future.

The economic, environmental and social costs of inaction will be far costlier than if we were not to

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develop a plan for resilience that combats the effects of Climate Change at the local level.

There are a number of areas that Council can address or improve on to ensure we as a Shire become proactive with our approach to reducing our carbon footprint. Please see our [interview video with Sally](#).

We hope that through engaging key stakeholders that are at the forefront of delivering a better climate future for us all, and sharing that with all our community, will help in addressing any concerns about declaring a Climate Emergency and the development of our shared Climate Change Action Plan.