The Hunter Joint Organisation of Councils

Climate Change and Resource Efficiency Policy Branch
NSW Office of Environment and Heritage
PO Box A290
Sydney South, NSW 1232

Friday 16th December 2016

RE: SUBMISSION TO NSW CLIMATE CHANGE FUND DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN

The Hunter Joint Organisation of Councils welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the NSW Climate Change Fund Draft Strategic Plan. The attached submission was developed with input from our member Councils:

- Central Coast Council
- Cessnock City Council
- Dungog Shire Council
- Lake Macquarie City Council
- Maitland City Council
- Mid-Coast Council
- Muswellbrook Shire Council
- City of Newcastle
- Port Stephens Council
- Singleton Council
- Upper Hunter Shire Council

The submission identifies key areas of the draft plan that are supported by the Councils of the Hunter, Central Coast and Mid Coast region, as well as potential issues, concerns and opportunities for consideration. Key points include:

- While the development of a plan to achieve net zero emissions in NSW is supported, it must be recognised that areas such as the Hunter Region, which feature a high degree of energy intensive / emissions generating industries, will require specific, tailored planning support to assist it transition its economic base, in a planned and orderly manner, toward a more advanced energy / low emissions future.

- Local government can contribute significantly to the achievement of energy efficiency and climate adaptation directions identified in the NSW Government’s Climate Change Policy Framework, and the actions included in the draft Climate Change Fund Strategic Plan. However the local government sector requires adequate resourcing and support to enable this to occur.

- The establishment of Joint Organisations via the NSW local government reform process, provides a significant opportunity to facilitate achievement of the objectives and actions included in the draft Climate Change Fund Strategic Plan. Over many years Hunter Councils, along with other regional groups of councils has collaborated successfully with both Commonwealth and State Governments and member councils to undertake research, build awareness and capacity and design regional and sub regional resources and tools to assist councils reduce carbon emissions and practically adapt to climate change at a local level. This approach has proven to provide both significant financial efficiencies, as well as play an important role in building consistency and capacity in all Councils across regions to understand and prepare for the risks posed by climate change. Investing in Joint Organisations through the Climate Change Fund provides an important opportunity through which to effectively deliver on the actions included in the draft Plan.
We thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission. Please do not hesitate to contact Steve Wilson (Deputy Director Hunter Councils Environment Division) on 02 4978 4026 to discuss any aspect of the submission.

Yours Sincerely

[Signature]

Roger Stephan
Chief Executive Officer
Detailed Submission

The following submission has been compiled with advice and information from the 11 Councils of the Hunter Joint Organisation region. Individual Councils will also be submitting their own detailed submissions.

General Comments

1. Councils welcome the NSW Government’s recognition of climate change as a significant issue for the NSW environment and community. Councils support the Government’s commitment to address both the factors contributing to, and impacts arising from climate change, via the strategies and actions included in the NSW Climate Change Policy Framework and Climate Change Fund Strategic Plan. Councils encourage the NSW Government to continue to clearly and consistently maintain and communicate this position to ensure the NSW community is fully aware and supportive of the need to tackle this significant environmental, social and economic issue.

2. Subject to adequate support and resourcing, local government can contribute significantly to the achievement of energy efficiency and climate adaptation directions identified in the NSW Government’s Climate Change Policy Framework, and more specifically the actions included in the draft Climate Change Fund Strategic Plan. This reflects the sector’s strong focus and interface with local communities and their significant role in planning and delivering a range of services with direct relevance to reducing emissions and adapting to climate change risks at a local level. Supporting local Councils through the Climate Change Fund therefore provides an important means through which to deliver on the State Government’s objectives.

3. The establishment of Joint Organisations via the NSW local government reform process, provides a significant opportunity to also facilitate achievement of the objectives and actions included in the draft Climate Change Fund Strategic Plan. Over many years Hunter Councils, along with other regional groups of Councils such as the Sydney Coastal Councils Group (SCCG) and South East Climate Change Alliance (based in Victoria) has collaborated successfully with both Commonwealth and State Governments and member councils to undertake research, build awareness and capacity and design regional and sub regional resources and tools to assist councils reduce carbon emissions and practically adapt to climate change at a local level. This approach has proven to provide both significant financial efficiencies, as well as play an important role in building consistency and capacity in all Councils across regions to understand and prepare for the risks posed by climate change. Investing in Joint Organisations through the Climate Change Fund provides an important opportunity through which to effectively deliver on the actions included in the draft Strategic Plan.

Accelerated Advanced Energy

Section 2.1. Unlock investment under the renewable energy target

Potential actions proposed

- Advocate for stability and certainty in Commonwealth Government Renewable Energy Policy

Comment

4. This action is supported. Such advocacy however, should also extend to broader aspects of emissions reduction and climate adaptation. Frequent and substantial change, and ongoing uncertainty in climate policy at a both Commonwealth and State Government levels has made it difficult in recent years for local government to effectively plan and implement effective
strategies to reduce emissions and engage communities in collaboratively planning for the impacts of climate change.

Section 2.2. Accelerate advanced energy technologies

Potential actions proposed

- **Support research and demonstration projects for renewable alternatives to natural gas and transport fuels in industrial applications, including concentrated solar thermal, biomass electrification and hydrogen**

Comment

5. This action is supported. Given the Hunter Region’s economy currently includes a high degree of energy intensive / emissions generating industries, it is recommended that investment to support demonstration projects of this nature be targeted to the Hunter region. This would foster innovation and change that would assist the Hunter transition, in a planned and orderly manner, its economic base toward a more advanced energy / low emissions future.

6. It is recommended that the State Government develop a Waste to Energy Strategic Plan, or provide specific strategic input into the inclusion of Waste to Energy infrastructure in the development of updated Regional Waste Avoidance & Resource Recovery Strategies throughout the waste regions of NSW. These plans should identify (i) strategic locations throughout the State where Energy from Waste (EfW) facilities could be located to accept Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) (ii) Determine MSW tonnage limits at these facilities to ensure the creation of the EfW industry does not provide a competing waste management paradigm to the waste avoidance targets (i.e. if too many large facilities are built, then there will be a need for a minimum amount of waste to be generated to keep the industry afloat); and (iii) Stipulate the type of material inputs acceptable in facilities (% MSW, % organics, % high caloric recyclables, etc). Strategic plans of this nature would facilitate a more inclusive approvals process by the NSW Government, Councils and industry stakeholders, and an appropriate and agreed balance between advanced energy generation objectives and those of waste avoidance and recovery.

Section 2.4. Accelerate the transition to a 21st century transport fleet

Potential actions proposed

- **Investigate appropriate incentives to encourage the purchase of fuel efficient light vehicles and to retire inefficient vehicles**

- **Investigate the case for public investment in electric vehicle charging infrastructure and the requirements for renewable energy power supply**

Comment

7. These actions are supported. Councils would welcome access to financial incentives to assist them transition to more fuel efficient vehicle fleets. It is important to note however, that there are a number of fleet focused programs that have been piloted or delivered by local councils in the past (e.g. Fleetwise). A review and evaluation of their ongoing relevance and effectiveness in a local government context is recommended prior to the creation of potentially “new” fleet focused incentives or initiatives.

8. Exploring public investment in electric vehicle charging infrastructure is supported, as it would assist with addressing the current “chicken and egg” scenario that is particularly present in regional areas such as the Hunter. That is, people are not likely to invest in electric vehicles until charging facilities are available across the broader expanses of the region in which they are travelling.
9. While the strong focus on electric vehicles is supported, it is recommended that the draft plan also broaden its language to encompass “new technologies and fuels”, so that the potential to embrace non electric vehicle options that may also become available in the future is not excluded.

Section 2.5. Empower local communities to adopt renewable energy

Potential actions proposed

- Build capacity in Councils in regional areas to provide advice to their communities on advanced energy
- Help community energy groups to share knowledge and experience with financing and delivery models to get community energy projects off the road

Comment

10. These actions are supported. If resources are provided to Councils or Joint Organisations, the potential exists for them to actively engage, advise and coordinate initiatives with local communities regarding advanced energy. Such work would capitalise upon the strong, established and trusted channels and networks held by local councils with their communities.

Section 2.6. Support heavy industry to plan for a low emissions economy

- Coal Innovation NSW continuing to support research into low emissions coal technologies and encouraging the development and implementation of these technologies, including investigating ways for coal mines to reduce their fugitive emissions, including via the Commonwealth Government’s Emissions Reduction Fund
- Strengthen emissions-performance requirements and monitoring in land-use planning and major project planning approvals processes
- Advocate for Commonwealth, COAG and international action consistent with the Paris Agreement
- Advocate for improvements to Commonwealth policy and programs to address key emissions sources in New South Wales such as agricultural production systems and transport
- Support primary industries, including farmers to save emissions or enhance carbon sequestration and attract funding from the Commonwealth Emission Reduction Fund.

Comment

11. These actions are generally supported. Given the Hunter Region’s economy currently includes a high degree of energy intensive / emissions generating industries, these actions will assist in facilitating a planned, staged transition to a more advanced energy / low emissions future that avoids significant and sudden economic and social disruption.

Section 2.7. Save emissions and maximise the benefits in NSW

Potential Action Proposed

- Support primary industries, including farmers to save emissions or enhance carbon sequestration and attract funding from the Commonwealth Emission Reduction Fund

Comment

12. This action is supported given that the Hunter supports a diversity of agricultural industries that contribute substantially to the region’s economy. Assisting these industries transition to a more
advanced energy / low emissions future is considered essential to ensuring their ongoing viability in the region. Its delivery could be facilitated through resourcing programs to be provided by regional organisations including Local Land Services or Joint Organisations that would integrate and build on existing established relationships and programs between these organisations and the rural sector.

Section 2.8. Find cost effective pathways to reduce emissions

Potential actions proposed

- Monitor and predict the impact of current and new policy initiatives on the state’s emissions performance
- Develop a plan for NSW to achieve net zero emissions

Comment

13. The development of a plan to achieve net zero emissions in NSW is supported. However it is essential to recognise that areas such as the Hunter Region, which feature a high degree of energy intensive / emissions generating industries, will require specific, tailored planning support to assist it transition its economic base, in a planned and orderly manner, toward a more advanced energy / low emissions future.

National Leadership in Energy Efficiency

Section 3.1. Government to lead by example to lower energy costs

Potential Action Proposed

- Support Councils to upgrade public lighting and adopt the Government Resource Efficiency
- Implement government energy management and reporting systems to help agencies understand where and how to make energy savings
- Develop clean energy standards for new government funded infrastructure projects and investigate the best way to implement them

Comments

14. The objective of government leading by example is supported, including at the local government level. Councils would welcome the opportunity to access financial support from the Climate Change Fund, either to individual councils or regionally to Joint Organisations, to identify and implement priority energy saving measures. This reflects the reality that while Councils across the Hunter region clearly recognise the financial and environmental benefits of such measures, and in many cases have identified priority works and accompanying payback periods, allocating funding towards them remains a challenge due to competing priorities in a very constrained financial environment.

15. Further to the above point, were financial support made available to Joint Organisations, it would enable them to directly and practically support member Councils deliver energy efficiency initiatives. For example, Joint Organisations provide a mechanism through which centralised staff resources can be hosted. Such positions could provide direct technical and project management support to member councils to identify, prioritise and project manage delivery of energy savings initiatives. This would particularly benefit a number of Councils in the Hunter region who presently have no (or extremely limited) staff resources available to them to focus on work of this nature.

16. The action to support councils upgrade public lighting is supported, with it recommended that the State Government take a lead role in facilitating progress between Councils and utility service providers to bring about more energy efficient public lighting. It is also recommended that the
imposition of mandatory energy efficiency standards for street lighting by the NSW Government would provide a quicker and more effective means of reducing emissions from public lighting across NSW. These recommendations reflect the fact that street lighting represents a significant financial costs to councils, yet because the lighting asset is owned and managed by electricity distribution utilities, combined with an absence of binding service level agreements or energy efficient lighting standards, local councils have little influence over the efficiency of public street lighting infrastructure in their area.

17. It is recommended that guidelines (incorporating case studies) be developed for key types of infrastructure provided by local government (e.g. community centres, libraries, aquatic centres, art galleries, administration buildings, sporting facilities, water and wastewater facilities) to directly assist Councils ensure energy efficiency is considered and maximised when designing new facilities of this nature or retrofitting existing ones.

Section 3.2. Reduce energy costs for households and businesses

Potential actions proposed

- Accelerate energy efficient appliance standards under the national Greenhouse and Energy Minimum Standards program
- Consult on increasing future NSW Building and Sustainability Index (BASIX) targets for new homes to encourage industry innovation best practice, and reduce energy bills

Comments

18. Accelerating energy efficient appliance standards is supported as an important means through which to continue to reduce energy consumption and reduce ongoing household energy costs.

19. Increasing BASIX targets to provide greater minimum standards for building efficiency is supported. It is also recommended that where a Council, with the support of its community wants to raise these standards, that it be permitted to do so. This reflects the fact that while BASIX has set a minimum efficiency standard across the NSW, in some Council areas it has actually reduced the standards that had previously been required by Council prior to the introduction of BASIX.

20. It is recommended that where the introduction of new state-wide BASIX targets may require additional knowledge and skills within Councils to assess and apply, that the Climate Change Fund support the design, development, and delivery of training and capacity building resources to support Councils with the transition.

21. In regard to improving BASIX targets, it is recommended that a greater emphasis be placed on the thermal properties of new properties to make them more resilient to extreme heat events. NSW climate projections clearly identify historic and ongoing increases in the frequency and intensity of extreme heat days. Given the well documented health impacts associated with extreme heat, and increased energy consumption that will occur in conjunction with these (due to air conditioning), improving the heat resilience of new buildings should be a priority.

22. In addition to improving minimum efficiency standards, there is a need to improve the “energy literacy” of businesses and households on matters of energy supply, use and efficiency. The experience of councils is that many in their communities generally do not know how to correctly use appliances in order to maximise the energy and financial savings potentially available. Progress in this area could be achieved through state-wide education campaigns being delivered by the NSW Government, with resources also provided to Joint Organisations or councils to deliver more tailored local campaigns and initiatives. A recent example of this is the NSW EPA’s Litter Program, where location specific programs are delivered by councils (with EPA funding support), and supported by more generic State Government mass communication campaigns.
Section 3.4. Make homes more liveable and affordable for renters

Potential actions proposed

- Provide ratings for homes at the point of sale or lease to help renters and buyers know which properties would be cheaper to run and more comfortable to live in
- Improve energy performance of tenanted homes to make them more affordable and liveable for renters

Comments

23. Both of these actions are supported. Social research completed by Hunter Councils, has identified an extremely limited capacity to modify homes (to make them more resilient to climate events) by some of the region’s most vulnerable communities. As a result, those living in housing that lacks features including insulation, ceiling fans, natural ventilation and external shading are far more exposed to the health impacts of extreme heat events. It is therefore recommended that any star rating system, or energy improvement measures in tenanted homes, include an emphasis on heat resilience, which will reduce energy consumption as well as improve heat resilience.

24. As per comment #22, there is a need to raise the “energy literacy” of renters in regard to matters of energy supply, use and efficiency. The experience of councils is that many in their communities generally do not know how to correctly use appliances in order to maximise the energy and financial savings potentially available. Progress in this area could be achieved through state-wide education campaigns being delivered by the NSW Government, with resources also being made available to Joint Organisations or councils to deliver more tailored local campaigns and initiatives.

Section 3.5. Support vulnerable communities to access energy efficiency

Potential actions proposed

- Upgrade social housing by reviewing and expanding the Home Energy Action program, strengthening partnerships and developing innovative financing mechanisms
- As part of a review of energy concessions, the government will investigate the use of energy rebates and other innovative mechanisms to fund energy efficiency upgrade, taking into account community views
- Provide bill reduction advice that is tailored to the needs of vulnerable customers identified through better information

Comments

25. Were local councils or Joint Organisations resourced via the Climate Change Fund, they would be able to effectively and efficiently engage with vulnerable communities to raise awareness and encourage actions to implement energy efficiency measures. This would occur through the strong partnerships and established communication pathways councils have with Community Service Organisations in their area, and through the work Councils undertake directly with vulnerable communities. Hunter Councils is currently utilising this approach to encourage disaster resilience in vulnerable communities, and believes it has the potential to be extended to energy efficiency initiatives also.

26. It is recommended that initiatives targeting energy efficiency in vulnerable communities need to provide a high level of practical support (e.g. assisting with installation) and be linked to existing services provided to these groups to maximise the chance of engagement and uptake. Because of this, it is also recommended to target landlords to upgrade properties in which vulnerable people reside, as this may provide a more direct means through which to directly support these communities. These recommendations arise from the outcomes of social research (refer
comment #23) which has identified that many low income households have a severely restricted capacity to implement any kind of preparedness works, even quite basic measures (e.g. cleaning leaves out of gutters), because of financial or physical constraints, or because day to day life pressures mean that such activities are simply not on their radar. While that research focused on disaster preparedness, it is anticipated that these constraints would also extend to the uptake of energy savings measures.

Section 3.6. Support small businesses to access energy efficiency

Potential actions proposed

- **Invest in market capacity to deliver innovative energy efficiency products and services to small businesses and collect data to inform the Energy Savings Scheme**
- **Continue to provide energy efficiency training to general business advisers**

Comments

27. Local Councils generally have very strong relationships and communication with local small business operators and networks (e.g. Progress Committees, Town Management Committees, Local Tourism Boards and Local Economic Development Strategies). If resourcing support were to be made available to local councils or Joint Organisations via the Climate Change Fund, they could utilise these existing networks and relationships to effectively promote awareness, and to facilitate and manage the uptake of energy efficiency measures by small business.

Preparing for a Changing Climate

Section 4.1. Manage the risks of climate change to public assets and services

Potential actions proposed

- **Prepare best practice guides, tools and targeted training to help government agencies identify and manage climate change risks**
- **Support government agencies to meet their requirement to undertake initial climate risk assessments and develop appropriate responses**
- **Develop a framework for reporting government agencies adaptation initiatives to foster best practice**
- **Build the capacity of land management agencies to enhance bushfire management and prevention**

Comments

28. Support is generally provided for the above actions. In particular, it is recommended that the Climate Change Fund support the development of best practice guides, tools and targeted training to assist local government manage climate change risks, by investing in Joint Organisations to deliver such initiatives at a regional scale. Over many years Hunter Councils, along with other regional groups of Councils such as the Sydney Coastal Councils Group (SCCG) and South East Climate Change Alliance (based in Victoria) has collaborated successfully with both Commonwealth and State Governments and member councils, to undertake research, build awareness and capacity and design regional and sub regional resources and tools to assist councils practically adapt to climate change at a local level. This approach has proven to provide both significant financial efficiencies, as well as play an important role in building consistency and capacity in all Councils across the region to understand and prepare for the risks posed by climate change. It is therefore recommended that investment in Joint Organisations be provided through the Climate Change Fund to support ongoing regional work of this nature. One model worth considering in this regard, is the “Regional Contaminated Land Capacity Building Program”
currently being funded by the NSW Environmental Trust and NSW Environment Protection Authority across 4 regions in NSW. The program is resourcing the employment of a dedicated Contaminated Land Officer in each region, to directly build the skills, capacity and systems of councils in each region to identify and manage contaminated land. Given the success of this program, a similar model could potentially be adopted to coordinate the delivery of regional and local level energy efficiency and climate adaptation initiatives across NSW.

29. The NSW Government is a major owner and manager of land and property assets that are likely to be significantly impacted by worsening climate change hazards including sea level rise, flooding, storm damage, coastal erosion and bushfire. It is recommended that long term adaptation plans be developed for these resources by the agency responsible for their management. In locations such as the coastal zone, where multiple assets are managed by different agencies and where there is a high degree of interdependency between them, it is recommended that long term, integrated, locality based plans be developed collaboratively by relevant agencies, and that local council(s) and communities be involved in these planning processes.

Section 4.2. Support industry sectors and local communities to respond

**Potential actions proposed**

- Help the primary industries, energy and infrastructure sectors understand how they can respond to climate change risks and create opportunities
- Build capacity in coastal councils to respond to climate change risks
- Build capacity in coastal councils and joint organisations to understand and coordinate local responses to climate change impacts
- Provide tailored information resources and updated climate change projections, including the AdaptNSW website, on practical cost effective ways to reduce risks for local councils and communities

**Comments**

30. It is recommended that resources be directed to build the capacity of coastal councils or Joint Organisations to apply the “Decision Support for Coastal Adaptation: The Handbook” to support the management of coastal adaptation issues. This framework (which also has the potential to be adapted to non coastal issues) was developed collaboratively by Hunter Councils, coastal member councils, NSW Office of Environment and Heritage and Commonwealth Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency. Recognised by the IPCC’s Fifth Assessment Report (2013) as “leading practice”, it provides a consistent and transparent decision making framework to assist councils identify management options (including long term adaptation pathways) in vulnerable coastal areas, and is relevant to both existing coastal hazards and those projected to worsen due to climate change. Given the significant investment in this resource to date and recognition of its value by all involved in its development and review, it is recommended that its application be encouraged to build capacity in coastal councils to respond and prepare for climate change risks.

31. Support is generally provided for more tailored information to be provided to local government, however it is recognised that there is now a sufficient body of information available on general climate trends and projections that is suitable to assist Councils with adaptation planning processes. What would be of particular benefit to local government, is more specific information on climate extremes such as rainfall intensity and heat mapping, which could be used to underpin more detailed local climate adaptation modelling and planning work.
Section 4.3. Build the adaptation services market in NSW

Potential actions proposed

- Establish an adaptation innovation fund to support innovation and entrepreneurialism that could protect our local communities and provide export opportunities
- Investigate the need for accreditation schemes and information hubs for professional services involved in climate change such as agriculture, emergency preparedness and health.
- Improve building standards and planning requirements to take into account the impacts of climate change
- Investigate and develop rating systems to assess the climate resilience of residential and commercial properties and infrastructure

Comments

32. Support is provided for developing a rating system to identify the resilience of residential and commercial properties and infrastructure. Similar to energy rating systems for buildings, this would allow prospective purchasers or renters to more effectively identify the potential risk arising from climate related impacts (e.g. fires, storms, floods and extreme heat) to their lifestyle or business.

33. In addition to storms, bushfire and floods, it is recommended that any such rating system clearly incorporate the thermal resilience of properties in respect to extreme heat events. NSW climate projections clearly identify historic and ongoing increases in the frequency and intensity of extreme heat days. Given the well documented health impacts arising from extreme heat, encouraging more heat resilient residential and commercial buildings is considered a priority.

34. Support is also provided for improving building standards and planning requirements to take into account the impacts of climate change. Of note is that for local government to implement changes of this nature, clear statutory direction and support is required from the State Government to support local government apply such standards, and ideally changes to the Building Code of Australia.

Section 4.4. Unlock funds for local communities to respond to climate change

Potential actions proposed

- Minimise the impacts of climate change on socially and economically disadvantaged urban, regional, and remote communities through social impact investment for actions such as upgrading homes, community facilities and infrastructure
- Assist in making private finance, such as resilience bonds, available for households and businesses to adapt to climate change through partnerships with the finance and insurance sectors
- Support innovative pilot projects that demonstrate best practice adaptation and can be replicated in other regional communities or local government areas

Comments

35. Strong support is provided for the Climate Change Fund to support strategies that minimise the impacts of climate change on socially and economically disadvantaged communities. In particular, social research (refer comment #23), confirms a significant lack of awareness, planning and preparedness within vulnerable communities to the hazards posed by climate induced natural disasters. It also identified limited capacity to recover from disaster events, and in many cases, quite alarming perceptions and plans as to what people would do in an emergency.

36. As per comment #25, were local councils or Joint Organisations resourced via the Climate Change Fund, they would be able to effectively and efficiently engage with vulnerable communities to raise awareness and encourage actions to build resilience to climate change. This would occur
through the strong partnerships and established communication pathways councils have with Community Service Organisations in their area, and through the work Councils undertake directly with vulnerable communities.

37. It is recommended that future initiatives targeting vulnerable communities need to provide a high level of practical support (e.g. assisting with installation) and be linked to existing services provided to these communities to maximise the chance of engagement and uptake. It is also recommended to target landlords to upgrade properties in which vulnerable people reside, as a more direct means through which to directly support vulnerable communities benefit from adaptation measures in their home. This reflects the outcomes of social research (refer comment #23), that identifies that many vulnerable communities have a severely restricted capacity to implement any kind of works on or around their home.

38. In regard to implementing measures such as upgrading homes or community facilities and infrastructure, it is also recommended that measures consider energy efficiency wherever possible. For example, installing external shading or insulation will not only increase resilience to extreme heat events, but also have significant energy saving benefits.

39. It is recommended that the potential for collaborative investment across different NSW Government funding programs to support delivery of priority adaptation options be considered. For example, providing a Council(s) with the potential to access funding from both the Climate Change Fund and another funding program such as the NSW Floodplain Management Grants program, could provide the opportunity to more strategically lever limited available funds to deliver on objectives relevant to both programs. This would particularly assist with delivery of more expensive adaptation strategies where the capacity of a Council(s) or a single State Government program is too constrained to permit implementation (e.g. the voluntary acquisition of properties that are identified in Flood Risk management plans as being vulnerable or more frequently impacted by flooding due to climate change).

Section 4.5. Strengthen natural ecosystems to respond to a changing climate

Potential actions proposed

- Implement a program of information, tools and funds for demonstration projects to improve green cover in our cities and regional towns
- Investigate how to encourage the use of natural ecosystems to reduce the effects of climate change on people, communities and infrastructure, for example through flood mitigation and preventing coastal erosion

Comments

40. Support is provided for measures that improve the level of green cover in cities and regional towns. In particular it is recommended that the climate change fund invest in the design and construction / retrofitting of demonstration projects at the local area or precinct level, that integrate a range of measures to improve overall climate resilience and environmental sustainability. Such demonstration projects should incorporate energy efficient and climate resilient building design, Water Sensitive Urban Design / Integrated Water Cycle Management, open space areas and greater opportunities for pedestrian and cycling activity. Research is increasingly confirming not only the environmental benefits of such design, but that it encourages greater social connectivity, physical and mental health outcomes – all factors that contribute to more climate resilient communities.

41. Statutory or policy direction from the State government on minimum requirements for green cover to be included in new developments, would provide significant support to Councils to achieve the objective of increased green cover. This reflects the fact that in many local communities there is a reticence to retaining or adding more trees to the urban landscape.
42. Support is also provided for the action to “encourage the use of natural ecosystems to reduce the effects of climate change”, and supporting text that includes “a commitment to long term and coordinated conservation efforts on private land”. Unfortunately however, it is considered that the recent biodiversity legislation reforms that have been passed into law by the NSW Parliament, will conflict with the achievement of this action.

Section 4.5. Improve information on local climate change impacts

Potential actions proposed

- Update and enhance the state wide climate projections developed with NARCLIM, including projections for longer time periods and under different emissions scenarios
- Produce hazard maps and reports for key hazards, such as flood, bushfire, drought and heat, to help decision makers understand risks
- Co-fund new research on extreme climatic events, such as extreme rainfall or wind, to understand future risks as part of the NSW Adaptation Research Hub
- Co-fund new research into climate change risks and adaptation options for priority sectors, such as primary industries, health, water security and vulnerable communities, as part of the Adaptation Research Hub
- Identify risks to critical public infrastructure such as energy, water, transport and health infrastructure and options to manage these future risks

Comments

43. Support is generally provided for these actions, however it is recognised that there is now a significant body of information available regarding general climate trends and projections. What would be of benefit to local government, is more specific information in respect to climate extremes such as rainfall intensity or heat mapping which could be used to underpin more detailed local climate adaptation planning and design work.

44. As a considerable body of research now exists on the nature of climate change impacts on various industries and communities, it is recommended that greater investment be directed to support the implementation of identified adaptation priorities. For example, the councils of the Hunter, Central Coast and Mid North Coast have identified, via a regional collaborative risk assessment and adaptation planning process, over fifty regional priority adaptation priorities. In recent years however, a lack of Commonwealth or State funding support has restricted the capacity to progress these at both regional and local levels. It is therefore recommended that the Climate Change Fund direct investment to support the implementation of adaptation initiatives by local government, including investment in Joint Organisations to coordinate collaborative climate adaptation initiatives across member Councils.

Delivering the Strategic Plan

Section 5.1 Planning

This section of the draft Strategic Plan identifies that “the Climate Change Fund may be used to provide incentives through a range of innovative models. One model being explored is revolving loans, where the fund would provide loans to eligible projects, and these loans would then be paid back to the fund by the proponent”.

Comment

45. The availability of targeted financial incentives, particularly a revolving loan fund where councils or Joint Organisations could borrow money to invest and then pay back the fund through the
savings that are realised, is supported. This reflects the fact that while Councils may clearly recognise the financial and environmental benefits of energy efficiency initiatives, and in many cases have identified priority works and accompanying payback periods, allocating funding towards them remains a challenge due to competing priorities in a very constrained financial environment. Having access to a State managed revolving loans fund or other incentives would therefore significantly improve the capacity to fund works of this nature.