



According to the Climate Commission 2011-2020 is the crucial decade in terms of whether Australia can get on top of the climate change challenge or not,¹ Along with other sectors of Australian society, local government needs to ensure the effectiveness of its response to the causes and impacts of climate change, and these responses need to be addressed through local solutions and regional, national and international collaboration.

To respond to this challenge, on 4 May 2011 a representative group of researchers, policy makers, practitioners, elected representatives and managers with a local government focus came together for a roundtable at the University of Technology, Sydney. The roundtable was facilitated by the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) with sponsorship from the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility (NCCARF).

The Roundtable was devised to consider the local government sector's response to climate change, and identify and respond to identified policy and practice initiatives, gaps and research priorities for local government in dealing with climate change.

Four papers were prepared as a basis for the discussion:

- 'Local Government and Climate Change', including brief discussion of emerging issues, prepared by ACELG
- 'Lessons learnt from the former Cities for Climate Change program and implications for future planning and resourcing', prepared by ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability
- Review of climate change research being undertaken by government in partnership with the university sector, including a brief analysis of how the research is being applied by the local government sector and reflections on gaps and opportunities, prepared by NCCARF
- Review of current Federal and State government climate change policy, including a brief analysis of gaps and opportunities, prepared by Australian Local Government Association (ALGA).

Roundtable Agreements

The Roundtable agreed to adopt the following points as immediate priorities:

- Develop nationally consistent frameworks and methods for use by local government in contributing to a low carbon future
- Provide a platform for sharing innovation and new ideas and creating collaboration between researchers, policy makers and practitioners
- Review how local government research-focused resources can be used to meet needs identified at the Roundtable

¹ <http://climatecommission.gov.au>

For the longer term, the Roundtable agreed to:

- Build further interest and commitment by council CEOs and Mayors in taking a strong lead in integrating climate change into every day activities of councils
- Facilitate the integration of climate change into leadership and management training and the provision of mentoring for council staff
- Inform Federal and State Governments policies in relation to local government and climate change and how the support offered can best provide long term benefit.

The Roundtable acknowledges the following:

- Evidence shows climate change is occurring now
- A low carbon future is not an option but a necessity
- Local government has a unique role in advocating for a low carbon future and in providing strong leadership to local communities through energy efficiency measures and use of renewable energy
- Addressing the vulnerability of communities to climate change impacts, and build community resilience needs to be addressed now, not at some future time
- Action by local government on climate change will complement actions to secure the productivity, sustainability and viability of local communities into the future.

Calls for Action

The Roundtable calls on local governments in collaboration with other spheres of government to:

- Take bold action in this crucial decade for preventing further human-induced climate change and adapting to the impacts of climate change at the local community level
- Seek partnerships beyond the local government sector, inclusive of the professions, that deliver planning, design, architecture/building and engineering solutions for a low carbon economy
- Support regional approaches that provide opportunities for resource sharing, 'up-scaling' and other expertise that can enhance the capacities of rural, remote and small urban councils
- Assess and promote methodologies and tools that integrate systemic improvements for accessing and using data for planning, decision-making and reporting purposes
- Develop a new language around climate change actions that will inspire communities.

Conclusion

The Roundtable endorses the collaborative efforts and potential of ACELG, NCCARF, ALGA and ICLEI to ensure that agreed Roundtable outcomes have a practical benefit to councils across Australia. In order to achieve this, it will be necessary to assist councils integrate policy and practice-focused research into local level planning.

Contact

Stefanie Pillora (Program Manager, Research)

Phone: 02 9514 4897

Email: stefanie.pillora@acelg.org.au