

Local government climate change action in NSW



A guide to climate
leadership

March 2024 | [AdaptNSW](#)



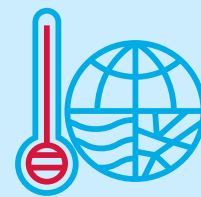
Local Government's response to climate change

The [latest global climate assessment](#) from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) highlights the major climate impacts facing Australia, as well as barriers and opportunities for responding to them.

Many local governments across NSW are already leaders in embracing climate actions to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change – to ensure their future and find new opportunities for investment and innovation. The NSW Government has a range of resources and programs to help NSW local governments plan and deliver their response to climate change, to ensure a sustainable and prosperous future.

Climate change in NSW

Temperatures in NSW have increased since records began in 1910 and are projected to keep rising. This will have [different impacts across NSW](#), with some areas experiencing larger temperature increases. Other major climate impacts include changes in rainfall patterns, and changes to the intensity, frequency, and distribution of extreme events such as floods, droughts and bushfires. Coastal regions will also experience climate impacts in the form of sea level rise and coastal erosion. These will affect NSW local government areas' (LGAs') productivity, liveability, jobs and industries, the health and wellbeing of residents, and the resilience of their natural and built areas.



The climate of
NSW
is changing



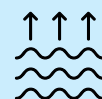
Hot days are increasing



Cold nights are decreasing



Changing rainfall patterns



Sea level rise



Fire weather is increasing

Data is based on [NARCLiM 1.0 \(2014\) climate projections](#) and sea level rise projections from the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\) 6th Assessment Report](#).

In a 2023 survey of NSW local government officers, 95% said they were experiencing the effects of climate change in their LGA.

Estimates show that every \$1 invested in climate change adaptation action could result in \$2-\$10 in net economic benefits. Adaptation and reducing emissions also benefit NSW's social, cultural and environmental values, making it a safe and effective investment option for all NSW LGAs.

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\$1

COULD
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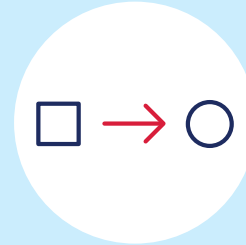
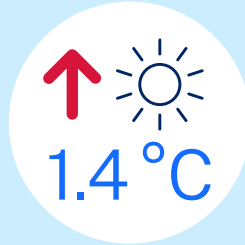
CLIMATE ACTION CO-BENEFITS



Adaptation and reducing emissions also benefits NSW's social, cultural, economic and environmental values, making it a safe and effective investment option for all NSW LGAs.

So what is action on climate change?

Action on climate change can be split up into two main groups: mitigation and adaptation.



Mitigation refers to actions that reduce the rate of climate change. This includes actions that limit or prevent greenhouse gas emissions and activities that remove these gases from the atmosphere.

But NSW has already warmed by approximately 1.4 degrees since records began in 1910, and will warm further before the world reaches Net Zero Emissions. So how do we deal with the impacts of climate change that are already locked in? That is where adaptation comes in.

Adaptation is adjustment to the actual or expected effects of climate change. It plays a key role in reducing exposure and vulnerability to climate change, and can be proactive, reactive, incremental or transformational.

Many of these actions have synergies. This means that they overlap and work together in both preventing further climate change and helping us adapt.

MITIGATION

ADAPTATION

SYNERGIES

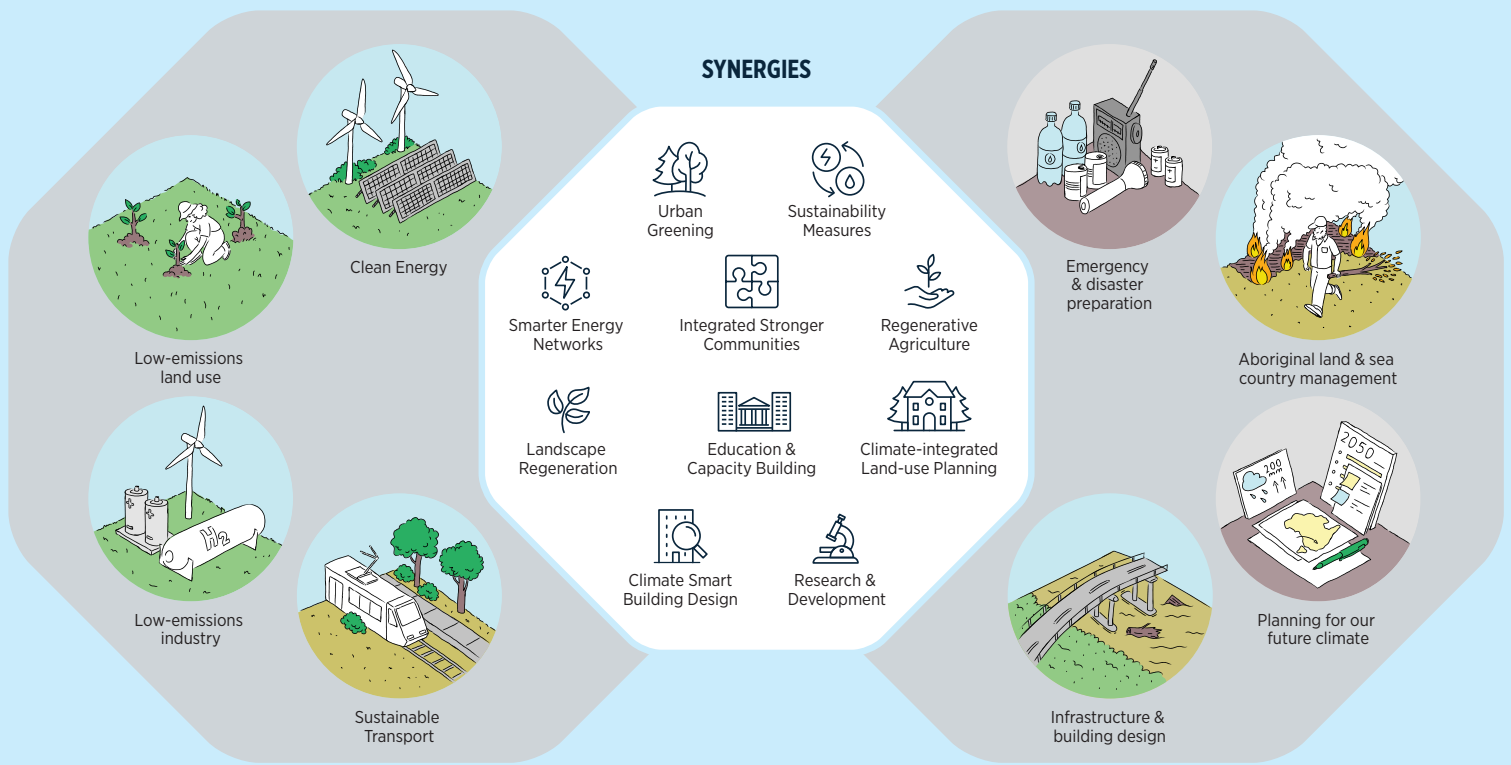


Image: Actions for climate change mitigation and adaptation often overlap to work together.

Climate leadership



NSW's local governments are the centre of their communities, bringing together local knowledge, essential services, community connections and support for the people of NSW. This makes them perfectly placed to lead local responses to the unique climate challenges they face and take advantage of new opportunities.

Some local government leaders are already incredible advocates for climate change action in their electorates, driving some of the most ambitious targets in NSW. For those just starting on their journey, there are many ways to lead your LGA's response to climate change, such as:

- developing climate policy for your council to action, including incorporating climate actions in your community strategic plan
- engaging with community stakeholders and businesses to raise awareness of reducing emissions and adapting to climate risks, understand concerns about climate change, and form partnerships for climate action
- networking, sharing knowledge and collaborating with other councils to strengthen NSW's collective response to climate change
- attracting investment in your region by supporting emissions reduction, climate resilience actions and low emissions goods and services, such as supporting manufacturing of renewable energy equipment (for example, solar panels and wind turbines), electric vehicle charging stations, and carbon credit and emissions offset programs

The pathway to net zero emissions and climate change adaptation

Effective responses to climate change involve actions to reduce emissions (to limit further climate change, known as mitigation) and adapt to impacts (to reduce negative impacts from climate risks). Some of these actions are mutually beneficial and work together to both [mitigate and adapt](#). Both mitigation and adaptation are important for achieving more effective responses in NSW.

Many NSW local governments are already planning, implementing and collaborating on projects to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change. For example, in Sydney through the [Resilient Sydney Program](#); or across regional NSW through Joint Organisations of councils like the [Hunter Joint Organisation](#) collaborating on key projects, including climate action.

Councils integrate their LGA's climate response into business-as-usual through the [Integrated Planning and Reporting framework](#) (IP&R framework). The Hunter Joint Organisation's [Climate Change Integrated Planning and Reporting Package](#) provides support and guidance to do this. This will help councils identify the key climate risks facing their LGAs, as well as priorities and opportunities to adapt to our changing climate.

Some councils may set emissions targets at this planning stage, while others may identify the groundwork that needs to happen first. Either way, having a commitment to respond to climate change in IP&R documents ensures that it will be embedded throughout council operational and business planning.

Ready to get started?

The next section of this guide includes information and practical actions for council staff to implement. It provides clear steps and tools to help staff put their climate policy into action

Practical steps to climate action

NSW councils can strengthen their response to climate change and take advantage of the economic benefits of mitigation and adaptation.

The NSW Government offers practical tools and guidance to help councils implement climate actions on their pathway to net zero emissions and climate change adaptation.

Your council's capacity for climate action depends on the skills and resources that are available, as well as opportunities, limitations and barriers that may affect your actions. You can assess your capacity for reducing emissions and adapting to climate risks using the NSW Government's [LG Climate Readiness Tool](#).

Whether you are just starting out on your pathway or have already implemented actions, you can start planning your next steps using a 4-step plan to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change.



1 Establish the context

Understanding your local and wider contexts and how they relate to your local area is the first step in action on climate change. Your council's context is made up of:

- the climate change impacts, risks, and causes that are unique to your LGA
- your council's ability to reduce emissions and adapt, including resourcing, opportunities, limitations, influences, values, and policies, strategies, and climate actions already underway
- wider NSW Government policies and legislations, such as [NSW Net Zero Plan Stage 1: 2020–2030](#).

Council Process	Adaptation	Mitigation	Resource examples
			
Establishing the context			
Assess your council's existing climate risk management, adaptation and emission reduction capacity			Local Government Climate Readiness Tool
Understand drivers for your council's climate change response			NSW Net Zero Plan Stage 1: 2020 – 2030 NSW Adaptation Strategy Regional Plans Stakeholder engagement
Secure senior leadership and/or councillor endorsement for a proposed climate risk and/or emissions reduction response for council operations.			Net Zero Emissions Insight webinar series - Webinar 1 Summary Climate Change policy template
Go further: Secure senior leadership and/or councillor endorsement for a proposed climate risk and/or emissions reduction response for your LGA.			Net Zero Emissions Insight webinar series - Webinar 1 Summary Climate Change policy template
Set your councils commitment level through the IP&R Framework			HunterJO IP&R Package

2 Identify, analyse & evaluate

Once you know your context, you can look at climate and emissions data for your area to identify priorities and opportunities for reducing emissions and adapting to climate risks. Data can be collected from your local council, industries, businesses, and communities.

Reviewing [future climate projections](#) will help identify the key climate risks your LGA is likely to face, such as sea level rise, coastal erosion, increased flood risks, heatwaves and urban heat. Once you know the risks, you can plan actions to adapt.

Council Process	Adaptation	Mitigation	Resource examples
			
Establishing the context			
Select the most relevant climate variables to assess risks and opportunities (including emissions scopes and boundaries)	✓	✓	Transition to Net Zero: Local Government Role in Greenhouse Gas Emissions reductions to 2030 & 2050 Net Zero Community Emissions Guide for NSW Councils and Strategy Template - Appendix A
Conduct a climate risk assessment for council operations	✓		Climate Risk Ready Guide NSW Climate Risk ready training
Go further: Conduct a climate risk assessment for your LGA	✓		Climate Risk Ready Guide NSW Climate Risk ready training
Understand your emissions profile for council operations		✓	Transition to Net Zero: Local Government Role in Greenhouse Gas Emissions reductions to 2030 & 2050
Go further: Understand your emissions profile for your LGA		✓	Net Zero Community Emissions Guide for NSW Councils and Strategy Template - Pg 12 of PDF Snapshot Climate Or Resilient Sydney
Work across council operations, council networks and community stakeholders to identify priorities for action	✓	✓	Transition to Net Zero: Local Government Role in Greenhouse Gas Emissions reductions to 2030 & 2050

3 Treat climate risks & reduce emissions

Combine your local context, priorities, and opportunities into a plan to reduce emissions and manage and adapt to climate risks. Your plan will allocate your resources and capabilities (identified in step 1) to the opportunities and priorities to reduce emissions and adapt (identified in step 2).













The [Climate risk ready NSW guide](#) provides practical guidance to help you assess and manage climate change risks. The [Net Zero Community Emissions Guide for NSW Councils and Strategy Template](#) contains guidance and useful resources to help you develop a net zero emissions strategy for your LGA.

Council Process	Adaptation	Mitigation	Resource examples
Establishing the context			
Develop a plan to respond to priorities	✓	✓	Climate Risk Ready NSW Guide (PDF) Guide to Climate Change Risk Assessment for NSW Local Government The Climate Risk Ready NSW Climate Risk Assessment Tool Climate change policy template Net Zero Community Emissions Guide for NSW Councils and Strategy Template - Pg 14-20 of PDF
Involve external stakeholders where interdependent risks or risks to communities and customers have been identified	✓	✓	Guide to Climate Change Risk Assessment for NSW Local Government Net Zero Community Emissions Guide for NSW Councils and Strategy Template - Pg 20 of PDF
Resource prioritised actions	✓	✓	Transition to Net Zero: Local Government Role in Greenhouse Gas Emissions reductions to 2030 and 2050 Community grants for climate change adaptation

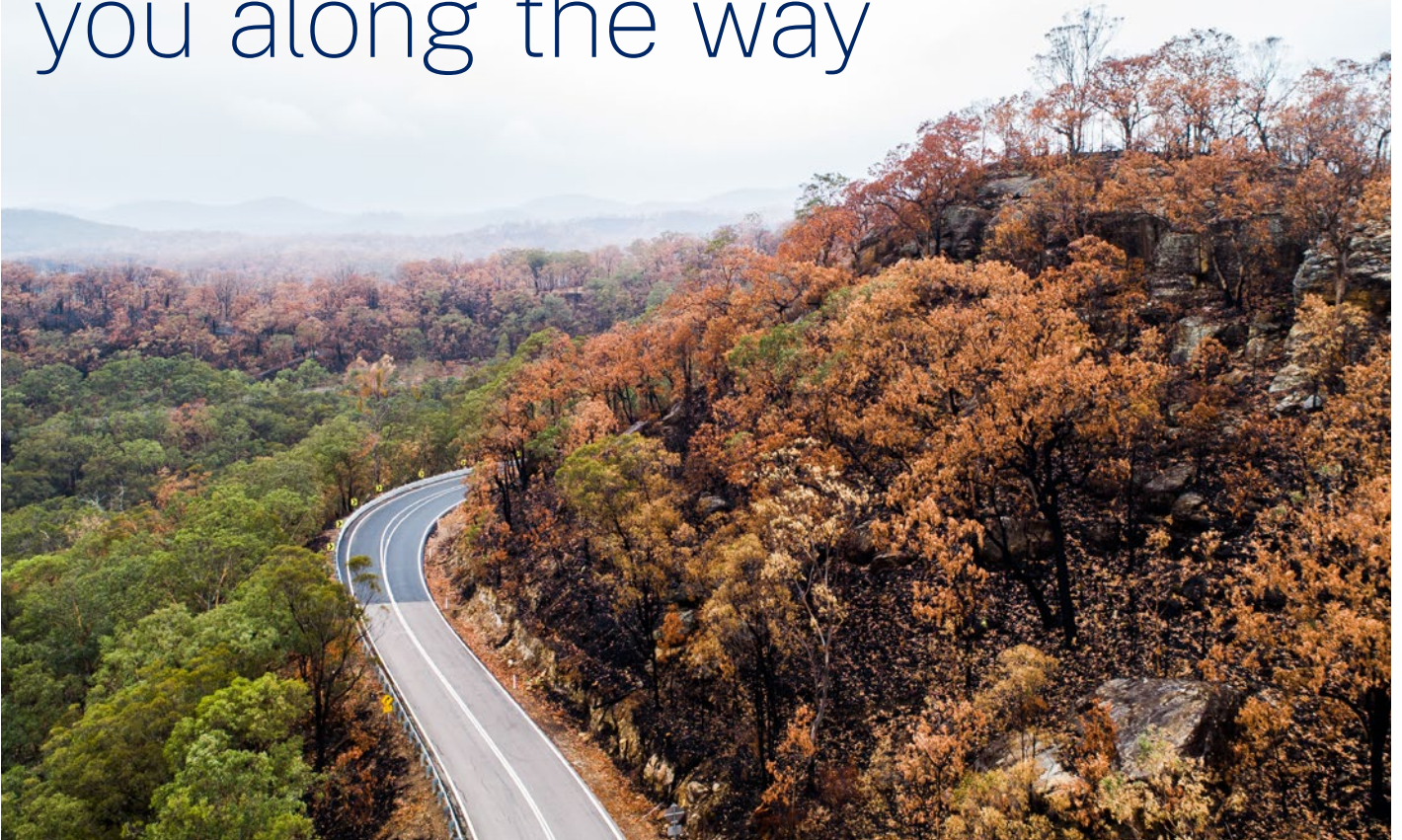
4 Monitor, evaluate & report

Regularly monitor and evaluate your progress towards net zero emissions and climate change adaptation.

This will help you adjust your actions if progress isn't on track, or if your context changes.

Council Process	Adaptation	Mitigation	Resource examples
			
Establishing the context			
Develop a monitoring and evaluation plan			Adaptation monitoring and evaluation template Net Zero Community Emissions Guide for NSW Councils and Strategy Template - Pg 21 of PDF
Develop a formal process for evaluation and updating			Climate change policy template
Identify trigger points or management thresholds to initiate the review and escalation of longer-term risks in an adaptation plan.			Adaptation monitoring and evaluation template
Establish an annual review process to evaluate emissions performance versus reduction targets listed in the plan.			Climate change policy template
Share your successes			Net Zero Community Emissions Guide for NSW Councils and Strategy Template - Pg 22 of PDF

Resources to help you along the way



The following resources will help you on your pathway to net zero emissions and climate change adaptation:

- [Net Zero Community Emissions Guide for NSW Councils and Strategy Template](#) - guidance and useful resources to help NSW councils develop a net zero emissions strategy for their LGA.
- [Guide to climate change risk assessment for NSW local government](#) - a guide to help councils assess the risks of climate change.
- [NSW LG Climate Readiness Tool](#) - a tool for councils to self-assess their capacity for reducing emissions and adapting to climate change.
- [AdaptNSW: Climate change in my region](#) - information about how different regions in NSW are affected by climate change.
- [AdaptNSW: Climate change in Metropolitan Sydney](#) - information about how Sydney is affected by climate change.
- [AdaptNSW: Why adapt to climate change](#) - information about the need to adapt to the impacts of climate change.
- [AdaptNSW: Climate projections used on AdaptNSW](#) - Information about the New South Wales and Australian Regional Climate Modelling (NARClIM) climate projections.
- [NSW Net Zero Plan Stage 1: 2020-2030](#) - The NSW Government's plan to reach net zero emissions by 2050.
- [Climate risk ready NSW guide](#) and [Climate Risk ready training](#) - guidance to help NSW Government agencies manage climate change risks.
- [Adapt NSW Resources for Local Government](#) - guidance, tools and templates to support local government with their climate change journeys.

Learn from others & find out more



Learn from others

Many councils across NSW are already planning, implementing and evaluating their climate actions. Learning from their experiences can help you plan effective climate actions for your LGA.

- [AdaptNSW local government stories and case studies](#)
- [LGNSW case studies](#)
- [Hunter Joint Organisation Climate Change Integrated Planning and Reporting Package](#)
- [Net Zero Emissions Insight webinar series](#)
- [Local Government NSW's Climate action professional officers group.](#)

The NSW Government is here to support councils and their communities in taking climate action. The following programs can assist councils, local businesses, industry and households through a mix of direct support, capacity building and financial incentives:

- [Sustainability Advantage](#)
- [NSW Climate and Energy Action](#)
 - Electric vehicle Fleet Incentives
 - Electric Vehicle Fast Charging Grants
 - Energy Saving Scheme
 - Net Zero Industry and Innovation
 - Primary Industries Productivity and Abatement
 - Accelerating Net Zero Buildings
 - Net Zero Organics