

**Submission: Updating the Authority's advice on meeting Australia's Paris Agreement commitments**

ICLEI Oceania welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the Policy toolkit required to meet the Paris Agreement.

**About us**

ICLEI Oceania is a not for profit, non government organisation with a membership base drawn from local governments. ICLEI Oceania is an independent organisation hosted by the City of Melbourne with a regional governing structure made up of local councillors.

Internationally, ICLEI- Local Governments for Sustainability is a global network of more than 1,750 local and regional governments committed to sustainable urban development. Active in 100+ countries, we influence sustainability policy and drive local action for low emission, nature-based, equitable, resilient and circular development. Our Members and team of experts work together through peer exchange, partnerships and capacity building to create systemic change for urban sustainability.

ICLEI is the Local Government and Municipal Authorities (LGMA) focal point to the UNFCCC. In that capacity ICLEI coordinates input into the UNFCCC processes on behalf of city networks and local authorities. It provides the structure, process and reporting to inform member states and others about the role of the LGMA constituency and makes interventions to improve our collective ability to meet our Paris commitments.

In Australia ICLEI Oceania is lead city network supporting the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy.

**Introduction**

We recognise that the Australian Government ratified the Paris Agreement in November 2016. Australia's current Prime Minister has confirmed Australia's commitment to the Agreement. Australia as a signatory to the Paris Climate Agreement has flagged its intention to meet its 2050 target.

The goal of the Paris Agreement is to keep global temperature increase well below 2°C. Collectively, nations are not on track to meet that target and actions by local and regional actors are of the utmost importance to raise the ambition of existing Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC).

This submission would like to bring to the Climate Change Authority's attention that Australia has also agreed on the importance of local and subnational actors in supporting the implementation of the Paris Agreement. Parties to the Agreement committed to this point (P2):

*"Agreeing to uphold and promote regional and international cooperation in order to mobilize stronger and more ambitious climate action by all Parties and non-Party stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector, financial institutions, cities and other subnational authorities, local communities and indigenous peoples..."*

Climate and clean energy action at the cities level in Australia however is not mentioned in Australia's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), despite this local action is significant,

ambitious and gaining momentum. While there are numerous initiatives and State programs, currently there is no pan-Australian framework linking these initiatives to the international climate action framework, or to compile, measure and report on the extent, impact and effectiveness of Australia's cities and local government contribution to Australia's NDC.

### **International trends**

The importance of non-state actors in global climate change governance increased following the 2015 Paris Agreement. Subnational and private sector actors have been identified as some of the keys to tackling the 'emissions gap' and therefore contributing to keeping global warming below dangerous levels. This increases the importance and urgency of cities and local governments making ambitious, robust and transparent contributions to the global effort, including through partnering with their communities and the private sector.

Cities and local authorities globally have mobilised their efforts in the role as important information hubs on climate change issues, innovator of strategic and practical low and zero carbon actions, setting planning and policy context for positive climate outcomes and reporting and sharing these approaches domestically and internationally. All major global cities networks and local government associations together with the private sector (and in some cases with the support on national governments) are supporting a standardised measurable approach with reporting on numerous locally determined contributions (LDC).

While the initial "sector-based" approach recommended by the Climate Change Authority to identify the scale of the emissions challenge is important, we believe that policy direction must now change to focus on engaging with the broad Australian community directly through the range of facilitators for climate action. A major one is, of course, local government.

A sector-based approach does not recognise the role of cities in the climate challenge. Cities are responsible for around 70 percent of global energy-related greenhouse gas emissions, and are among the most vulnerable areas to climate change impacts. Australian cities and local governments are part of the solution and should be recognised as a contributor to any climate solutions supported by the Australian Government.

No doubt the Climate Change Authority is aware of many local councils declaring a climate emergency. This is a direct result of the frustration about the speed of action, the need for transition to low carbon future and the perceived inaction by government. To monitor the effectiveness of those declaration many local governments are seeking ways to report and have those efforts recognised internationally.

### **New policy toolkit focus**

Local government networks, alliances and associations, together with major supporters like the European Commission have worked together to promote the full commitments made in the Paris Agreement - specifically the need for nations to engage with non-state actors. Collectively this has resulted in a coordinated, robust and influential global approach by combining the efforts of local governments working with their communities to reduce community wide emissions and respond strategically to climate challenges.

The result of this cooperation is called the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy (GCoM) which is the pre-eminent international approach to mobilising local action towards a shared vision for a low emission and resilient society. The GCoM is a broad global alliance that enables and supports voluntary action on combating climate change currently involving over 9,300 cities and local

governments, which represents over 800 million people in over 125 countries on six continents. Global membership is growing as more local governments respond to the need for urgent action.

Local leaders around the world are pursuing ambitious climate initiatives in their own communities. They are key to delivering on the Paris Agreement. All levels of government – cities, regions and nations – have a role to play when it comes to raising the bar and working hand-in-hand with the scientific community, financial institutions, and the private sector. Through dynamic, multi-level collaboration a net-zero-emission world can be achieved by 2050.

Currently 28 local governments are involved in the Australian chapter of the GCoM (August 2019), This includes all Australian Capital Cities (except Brisbane and Darwin) and includes many major regional centres and metropolitan councils representing approximately 14% of the Australian population. The core requirements of commitment to GCoM which includes a community greenhouse inventory, target setting at least consistent with Australia's NDC and strategic action plans and reporting on implementation. These are generally consistent with climate change policy in Australia at both the state and national level.

In Australia GCOM is managed on behalf of international local government networks by ICLEI Oceania, which has delivered sustainability programs at the national and state level for over 20 years including the Cities for Climate Protection (CCP)- Australian largest climate action program which engaged over 240 councils. This program was successful through funding support from the Australian Government until 2008.

In early 2019, with support from the European Commission, ICLEI Oceania undertook a national consultation process on the role of local government and the effectiveness of the GCoM to contribute to Australia's NDC. Findings included the identification that the GCoM emissions reporting is consistent with national measurement standards, local government can significantly amplify and deliver national programs, (for both emissions reduction targets and renewables targets), local government can help to ensure attainment of the current national targets and the more ambitious State targets. It was found that many State based programs already have strong alignment to GCoM reporting framework and national consultation emphasised that the Australian Government support and endorse the GCoM as one of the most effective means to engage the Australia community in contributing to our national targets.

ICLEI Oceania believes the Australian Government should be made aware of the significant benefit of supporting and endorsing the GCoM as a framework for real action. Australia should join with other Paris Agreement countries in supporting local government approaches that strategically endorse the GCoM to accurately measure emissions, set targets at least as ambitious as Australia's NDC and develop comprehensive action plans to meet these outcomes. This is the intention of the Paris Agreement and is being refined regularly.

The Australian Government needs to promote this engagement and support actions and approaches that build this support as a unified challenge. Currently the Australian public and the local government sector do not see Australian Government as having a coherent or inclusive approach or in taking leadership sufficiently. Declaring a climate emergency is just one response to the community's demand for stronger action.

Therefore a review of the policy context and toolkit should include the Australian Government recognising local government action, supporting implementation of approaches which assist meeting our national targets and reporting on the local government contribution in national and international reporting and review obligations.

While State governments have set more ambitious climate targets, either for overall reductions in carbon or/and increases in renewable energy there is no consistency Australia wide. Working more effectively with State Governments is essential as they often provide the policy and legislation framework to assist local government in reducing carbon, increasing renewables, adapting to climate challenges, building climate resilience or low carbon economy transition strategies on behalf of the Australian community. States have a role as part of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) where national policy agreements may be negotiated. It is important that the COAG is tasked with developing a comprehensive plan to meet our Paris Agreement immediately.

Australia's 537 local government authorities span diverse bio-climatic and socio-economic regions ranging from globally connected cities to the rural and remote. Australia's local governments are active in delivering climate adaptation and mitigation outcomes being involved in a diverse array of initiatives focused on reducing emissions and equipping and supporting communities prepare for climate challenges —some for over two decades.

The benefits of more widely activating the GCoM framework in Australia is potentially significant for more local governments taking climate change action where efficiencies and innovation can arise from collective action and combined advocacy. Support to prepare for adverse climate impacts while realising benefits from implementing low carbon solutions will benefit all communities and helps contribute to Australia's NDC task.

The GCoM approach within Australia offers significant opportunities to all levels of government and communities because it provides:

- Internationally tested tools and resources for action planning.
- A recognised framework with consistent and transparent reporting.
- Flexible approaches that suit Australia's jurisdictional and bioregional diversity.
- A direct measurable contribution to national emissions and therefore to overall global emissions.
- A means for local government to respond to and facilitate discussion with their communities on climate issues and challenges.
- A standard to compile, measure and report on the extent, impact and effectiveness of local governments' contributions and report on these nationally and internationally.
- The potential linking of local governments together in peer networks that learn from each other.
- Adopting the GCoM approach and framework in Australia provides significant opportunities for improved coordination and reporting.
- Standardised reporting is one of the many benefits for local governments being involved in this robust international approach
- Keeping track of local responses and measuring that impact remains a challenge given the scale of local activities and the lack of a coordinated national reporting framework.

## In Summary

ICLEI believes that the Australian Government support for the GCoM and other subnational climate programs contributes to an effective national climate change policy approach. This has the advantage of engaging with the Australian community through the effective facilitation by local and state governments -as agreed and intended as part of the Paris Agreement. This obligation has yet to taken up fully or in the spirit of the Paris Declaration by the Australian Government.

In response to a specific focus of the Climate Change Authority to consider new approaches in the Australian policy toolkit, we submit that the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy in Australia (GCoM) can provide a valuable contribution as it meets all the policy directions suggested in the review. It has: credibility, durability and simplicity, scalability, coherency with other policies, and flexibility.

Our submission highlights the alignment with the policy direction in this way. Therefore on the issue of :

- **credibility**—The GCoM has robust international standards and methodology. It covers appropriate local climate responses and is internationally identified as the pre-eminent local government approach to report on climate. It assists local government in developing relevant and comprehensive climate responses, while encouraging innovation and ensuring emissions reductions are real and in line with Australia’s NDC.
- **durability and simplicity**— The GCoM follows a robust yet simple methodology and associated reporting approach. It works equally with large or small, urban or remote councils. The approach therefore based on sharing experiences is able to reduce the overall costs to local and subnational government associated with implementing policies and actions.
- **scalability**—The GCoM program and its common reporting framework can be scaled up based on the specific priorities and programs at the state level or national level. The elements of setting targets, that are at least as ambitious as the Australia’s NDC, means an adjustment can be made to adjust any emissions reduction commitments over time based on national policy signals and support programs.
- **coherency with other policies**—ICLEI Oceania with support from the EU Strategic Partnerships for the implementation of the Paris Agreement (SPIPA) has undertaken a comprehensive policy and program gap analysis to ensure alignment with the current range of national and state government or local government programs. At this stage at least 29 programs at the national and state government level have strong alignment to the GCoM.
- **flexibility**. The GCoM framework is adaptable to local, regional or state needs or priorities. It can also be adjusted to meet national policy approaches.

## Conclusion

There is a need, in our opinion, for the Australian Government to recognise immediately the value of supporting local government and community action in contributing to the task of meeting our future zero carbon target. We believe there is major community concern as to whether Australia can meet

its Paris target, and a path forward may be to genuinely engage all states, local government and all sectors of society and economy.

- Focussing on community and subnational program delivery is a consistent and cost effective way for Australia to meet all its Paris Agreement obligations.
- The Australian Government needs to work with State Government and local government and the numerous associations, networks and NGO's to build a unified national approach to meeting our targets and obligations.
- The GCoM and the support programs and partnerships that underpin it provides an excellent way for Australian to meet its Paris Agreement obligations using the pivotal role of local governments in engaging with the broader Australian community.

ICLEI Oceania would welcome the opportunity to discuss the policy recommendations outlined in this submission in greater detail.

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Yours sincerely,

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