

Draft - Local government position on climate change mitigation

July 2018

Local government acknowledges that it has a role to play in contributing to emissions reductions, along with central government and every other individual, community, sector and business in New Zealand. LGNZ is seeking feedback on this draft position by 30 August 2018.



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**CLIMATE
CHANGE** 

Introduction

In 2017, local government released its Position Statement on Climate Change. In that Position Statement, local government recognised an urgent need for action to avoid future risks from climate change.

Since the release of the Position Statement in 2017, the Labour-led Government has committed to doing more to address the impacts of climate change, including by introducing a Zero Carbon Bill to Parliament in late-2018. It is highly likely that this will set emissions reduction targets in law and establish an independent Climate Change Commission. Local government welcomes the Government's commitment to greater action on climate change, and looks forward to the introduction of the Zero Carbon Act.

Notwithstanding the current lack of a coherent plan for New Zealand's transition to a net zero emissions economy, territorial and regional authorities have demonstrated commitment to contributing to the domestic reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (emissions) that New Zealand has committed to making, under the Paris Agreement. Councils have adopted a range of actions and strategies to reduce emissions within their organisations and their communities.

New Zealand's communities are also increasingly acknowledging the challenges and opportunities that climate change presents and the need for action.

For local government, climate change adaptation is a significant challenge and key area of focus. However, councils acknowledge that they have a role to play in climate change mitigation. In fact, local government sees climate change mitigation and adaptation as interrelated – they both require joint strategy. The introduction of the Zero Carbon Act will further cement the need for local government to play a role in both adapting to and mitigating the impacts of a changing climate.

This Sector Position on Climate Change Mitigation outlines the ambition that local government has for, and the commitments it makes to contributing to, the overall effort to reduce emissions in New Zealand. It also sets out the further support that local authorities need in order to enhance their contributions to emissions reductions. The Sector Position has been developed in light of the critical need for climate change mitigation if communities are to be prosperous and resilient, and in light of the anticipated increase in focus on climate change mitigation in coming months.

Local government's vision for prosperous communities

Local government acknowledges that climate change will affect all current and future communities. The impacts that we observe today are the result of historical emissions and the increase in emissions in recent decades will lead to significant change in the coming years.

Local government has a shared vision for what prosperous communities will look like in 2050 and beyond. The 2050 vision encompasses the environmental, social, cultural and economic well-being of communities. Local authorities recognise that climate

change creates both opportunities and significant challenges for achieving prosperity in these four areas.

Responsive leadership and a holistic approach to climate change mitigation that takes into account impacts on community well-being is therefore urgent. Emissions reductions are urgently needed at every level to ensure that communities continue to be prosperous. Local government has ambitions for the direction of travel that it will take to contribute to the achievement of emissions reductions.

Local government's role in climate change mitigation

Local government acknowledges that it has a role to play in contributing to emissions reductions, along with central government and every other individual, community, sector and business in New Zealand. Councils have a role to play in highlighting and helping communities understand the issues associated with climate change, and what people can do to address them.

Local government commits to fulfilling two key roles in contributing to emissions reductions, namely:

1. Councils reducing their own emissions; and
2. Councils taking a leadership role to encourage, support and coordinate efforts to reduce emissions within the city, district or region they represent.

Local authorities reducing their own emissions

Local authorities will demonstrate leadership and commitment to their communities by taking a holistic approach to striving to achieve emissions reductions across all areas of their operations.

A stocktake completed in 2017 reveals that a number of councils are already taking action to reduce their own emissions. Councils can and will continue to build on the work that is already underway by adopting strategies and taking actions to reduce their organisation's emissions. Councils will draw on the best practice examples of actions already underway within the sector.

Councils acknowledge that there are areas where they can move on contributing to emissions reductions right now. Procurement, transport and waste management for example, are areas where councils know that they can have significant influence and achieve progress towards reducing emissions.

Local authorities leading community emissions reduction efforts

Local authorities commit to taking a leadership role within the city, district or region they represent by encouraging, coordinating and supporting community-wide emissions reduction efforts. However, local government acknowledges that it cannot credibly undertake such a role if it does not first demonstrate tangible commitment to reducing its own emissions.

Local government will continue to communicate with its communities about the importance of reducing emissions, and the need for everyone to “do their bit” to contribute to emissions reductions. It will continue to advocate for, encourage and support wider uptake of action by its communities to reduce emissions. Councils will engage with a wide range of stakeholders to identify feasible options for reducing emissions within their cities, districts or regions, and will collaborate with stakeholders to maximise results. Local government acknowledges that it can play a coordinating role by supporting local efforts to reduce emissions, such as working with local businesses to provide electric vehicle infrastructure or support for waste minimisation initiatives, among other things.

Greater action by local government on climate change mitigation

Local government recognises that if real progress on climate change mitigation is to be achieved, there is a need for greater action by all facets of New Zealand society. Local government therefore commits to building on its existing efforts to reduce emissions and the previous commitments that it has made in the Position Statement, and councils in particular:

1. Commit to exploring options for developing a corporate mitigation/emissions reduction strategy and action plan to guide internal decision-making.
2. Commit to taking an ambitious approach to operational decision making that prioritises emissions reductions. Councils will, through the decision making process, evaluate the potential of actions to contribute to, and give priority to those actions that will result in, emissions reductions. Councils will maximise opportunities to reduce emissions which offer co-benefits, such as, but not limited to, cost savings, prudent financial management, carbon sequestration, improved water quality outcomes and water catchment security.
3. Will take a more proactive role in sharing knowledge, learnings and resources that will further support the local government sector as a whole to learn off different initiatives and use that knowledge to contribute to emissions reductions.
4. Will take advantage of the range of opportunities that they are presented with to reduce emissions, both within their communities and organisations. For example, local government acknowledges that the Government’s Provincial Growth (Regional Economic Development) Fund and 1 billion trees scheme present opportunities for councils to take up actions that can contribute to emissions reductions and offsets.

Measuring emissions

Local authorities acknowledge that they will be better able to target efforts towards emissions reductions if they properly understand their council’s and their city’s, district’s or region’s emissions. However, the complexity and cost of emissions profiling is a barrier preventing a large number of councils from measuring and properly understanding their emissions profile.

Local authorities commit to exploring options for sharing learnings, knowledge and resources with respect to frameworks and approaches for measuring emissions. Local government will continue to seek to work in partnership with central government to:

- Explore options for developing a nationally consistent approach to measurement of emissions, and provision of support for a framework that builds council capacity and capability in this area; and
- Explore options for developing a framework that ensures equitable allocation of resources to support climate change mitigation leadership.

Notwithstanding the difficulties that a number of councils currently face in undertaking measurement and profiling of their emissions, local authorities commit to continuing to take actions and adopt strategies that are aimed at achieving emissions reductions.

Regional collaboration to address climate change mitigation

Approaches to and strategies for achieving emissions reductions will depend on local conditions and circumstances, and therefore vary across New Zealand’s regions.

Local government acknowledges that regional collaboration between territorial and regional authorities is one way that regions can coordinate opportunities to reduce emissions, share knowledge and achieve consistent outcomes that will work for the particular region.

Local authorities commit to exploring opportunities for regional collaboration on climate change action, and will encourage the involvement of stakeholders and other interested local parties on any regional climate change action groups that territorial and regional authorities choose to establish.¹ Conversations about what can be done to reduce emissions need to be collaborative and involve a wide range of sectors and stakeholders.

¹ Note that regional climate change working groups have already been convened in Wellington and Canterbury regions.

Alignment of climate change mitigation and adaptation

Local government recognises that climate change adaptation and mitigation are interrelated. The emissions trajectory that we get locked into now will determine the extent of the adaptation challenge that New Zealand has to deal with. As such, there is a need to think in a more holistic and integrated way about how climate change can be addressed.

Councils will take an integrated approach to climate change adaptation and mitigation strategy and planning. In particular, councils commit to addressing their emissions trajectory hand-in-hand with increasing resilience. Councils will give priority to actions that simultaneously reduce emissions and better prepare their city, district or region for climate change impacts, by building resilience and enabling effective adaptation.

Barriers precluding local government from doing more

Local government has previously recognised in its Position Statement the value of explicitly incorporating climate change considerations, including emissions, into land-use decisions, district plans, urban design and development, energy use, transport planning and waste management, notwithstanding the existing lack of a statutory mandate to do so. Councils have previously committed to:

- ensuring that low carbon, climate-resilient development is adopted as a key tenet of urban growth and development and land-use decisions; and
- developing their understanding of the impacts of zoning and land use decisions on the emissions trajectory for their communities, in order to be able to make land-use decisions that mitigate emissions.

Notwithstanding those commitments, and the work that a number of councils have been undertaking to fulfil them, existing legislative and policy frameworks prevent councils from doing more to deliver and contribute to emissions reductions, both directly (as a provider of infrastructure and services) and indirectly (through their influence over activities responsible for emissions).

A number of local government legislative and policy frameworks do not align well with, or make any provision for, the overarching goals of climate change mitigation and reducing emissions. Existing frameworks do not sufficiently enable councils to deliver or facilitate the achievement of emissions reductions, particularly in respect of matters such as spatial planning, urban form, transport and the built environment.

Central government policy settings and incentives must provide clear, consistent and enduring direction to ensure local government is making decisions and adopting actions that will contribute towards achieving a net-zero emissions future.

There is an opportunity for cities, districts and regions to be supported by a legislative and policy framework that encourages and supports them to take different approaches to achieving emissions reductions, which would be more consistent with New Zealand's overarching climate change mitigation goals. Local government would benefit from and will advocate for:

- A clear legislative mandate for councils to contribute to the achievement of emissions reductions through those matters over which they have reasonable control, including revisions to legislative and policy frameworks to ensure that they empower and support councils to take a wide range of mitigation actions. Revisions to the Building Act and procurement frameworks for example would better enable councils to contribute to emissions reductions; and
- New policy tools that support councils to deliver and contribute to emissions reductions. Legislative provision for regional spatial planning and policies promoting quality compact urban form, for example, are powerful tools that would help councils to deliver integrated land use, infrastructure and transport planning, and achieve emissions reductions.

The local government sector intends to work to identify in detail the aspects of existing legislative and policy frameworks which need to be revised and updated in order to achieve better alignment with, and better support councils to contribute to, the achievement of the goal of net-zero emissions in New Zealand.

Local government does however urge the Government to ensure that if it is considering making changes to existing legislation and policy to achieve alignment with mitigation goals, it must discuss and carefully work through those changes with local government and its communities first. Central government must work with local government to understand the implications of any changes it is considering and the support that councils would need to deliver on any changes.

To comment with feedback on this draft please email grace.hall@lgnz.co.nz by 30 August 2018.



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