

Starting the Net Zero Emissions Journey

Background

In 2020, The Department commissioned a project to better understand the collective action NSW councils were talking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions both within their own operations and the local community. A survey was conducted as part of the project with a total of 119 council staff responding from 99 councils. This represents 77% of local councils within NSW.

Key findings from the research suggested that:

councils are looking for ways to gain buy-in from their senior leadership and co-workers to implement emissions reductions actions by:

- promoting the drivers and business case for reducing emissions to executives
- embedding it across council departments through clear communication
- leveraging community engagement.

Webinar 1: Starting the Net Zero Emissions Journey held on Monday 22 March sought to explore these opportunities by hearing from three councils in a peer-to-peer setting. Over 70 attendees heard from Dubbo Regional Council, Bega Valley Shire Council and Hawkesbury City Council about their experiences, successes and lessons learnt.

For more detailed analysis on our research:

[Download the summary of the report here: Supporting NSW Councils to Reduce Emissions – A needs assessment \(96KB\)](#)

Drivers for net zero emissions

Momentum is building for net zero emissions as driving factors are increasingly influencing business, organisations and governments to reduce emissions.

Table 1: Local and global drivers for action towards net zero emissions.

Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The 2015 Paris Agreement aims to limit global warming to 2 degrees (preferably 1.5). The UN International Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) concluded that limiting warming to 1.5 degrees is possible but requires unprecedented transition from all aspects of society (IPCC Special Report, 2018)• There are increased calls to raise nationally contributions during this year's COP 26 in Glasgow, which has been dubbed as the 'net zero' conference (UN Climate Change Conference UK, 2021).• COVID-19 recovery is front and centre for most governments across the globe with the opportunity to re-build local and global economies with greater emphasis on sustainability principles, commonly referred to as "Building Back Better" (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)• All States and Territories of Australia now have an emissions reductions target aligned to net zero by 2050 (100% Renewables).
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Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In early 2020, the top 5 risks in World Economic Forum's Risk Report were all climate-related. This is the first-time environmental concerns have dominated the report.• Sustainable finance is on the rise and there is a growing understanding on the urgent economic risk that climate change poses.
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The 2019-2020 Australian Black Summer Bushfires resulted in 1 billion animals killed, 800 million of those in NSW. 5.4 million hectares were burned in NSW equating to 6.8% of the state (Summer of Crisis Report, Climate Council of Australia, 2020).• On the back of the bushfires, floods swept many parts of the Nation, demonstrating to Australians that more intense weather events are becoming more frequent.
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• After the 2019-20 bushfires, eight in ten Australians (82%) are concerned that climate change will result in more bushfires (Climate of the Nation Report, 2020).• A large majority of Australians want to see action to address climate change at all levels of government (Climate of the Nation Report, 2020).• The vast majority (68%) of Australians agree that Australia should have a national target for net zero emissions by 2050, in line with all Australian states and territories and seventy-three other countries

Business case for net zero emissions

It is important to demonstrate and communicate the benefits that reducing emissions can bring for your council and community through a strong business case. Benefits will be unique to all localities but there are broad advantages that can apply to most Local Government Areas (LGA's) such as:

- contributing to the mitigation of climate change and **limit the impacts of global warming for your community**
- **saving energy, saving money** for council and community
- **addressing climate risk**; along with adaptation and resilience
- **responding to community expectations** locally and nationally
- attracting **private sector investment**
- joining a growing **network of climate leaders** from across NSW
- **providing cleaner air and healthier environments** for citizens

Developing up a net zero strategy for your council

Most councils generate an operational strategy to lead by example for their community and gain knowledge and experience on implementing net zero emissions before generating their community strategy. A net zero emissions strategy will always be unique to place but does have universal steps that can be followed by all councils for both operational and community emissions.

1. **Engage your stakeholders**
2. **Get to know your emissions profile**
3. **Identify emissions reductions pathways**
4. **Establish a target**
5. **Develop and implement your emissions reduction strategy**

6. Monitor and track your progress

For more information on how to start the journey towards net zero emissions visit our webpage or download our [Net Zero Emissions Guidance for Local Councils \(PDF 1.6MB\)](#)

Gaining support within your council and community

To create an effective net zero strategy, it is important to gain buy-in from your senior leadership and councillors, broader organisation and ensure that the community is on-board through effective consultation and communication. Obtaining buy-in from these differing groups can be done through a range of activities and is highlighted through three unique councils below:

Councillor buy-in

- Get expert or consultant advice on how to set and reach targets.
- Develop a strong business case as an action tool to start the conversation. See business case tips above as a great place to start.
- Present business case and consultant advice to council senior leadership highlighting the council savings and community benefits.

Dubbo Regional Council

- Council developed their Energy Strategy & Implementation Plan that focusses on reducing emissions from Council operations, in particular, from the use of non-renewables sources of energy.
- It is important to get support – you don't have to begin the journey alone. With support from the NSW Government's Sustainability Advantage Program and consultant 100% Renewables, Dubbo built and presented the business case for change to key council staff, executive leadership, and councillors.
- It is important to ensure there is ongoing consultation within council, get some small wins to start off and celebrate and communicate successes with your council and community.

[Watch the recording: Accelerating Dubbo Regional Council towards a renewable energy future](#)

Cross-organisational communication

- Engage an external consultant or expert body to present to your council colleagues and senior management on net zero emissions and what this could mean for your council and community. Alternatively, embed a link to [our net zero videos](#) into your presentations.
- Communicate the endorsement received from executive and senior management on the business case to broader council staff.
- Facilitate workshop to gain input from council staff on a net zero emissions strategy.

Bega Valley Shire Council

- Council released its Climate Resilience Strategy which sets the Shire-wide target for net zero emissions by 2050 with an interim target of 100% renewables by 2030.
- A cross-organisational working group and community Technical Advisory Panel were formed to provide input into the Strategy.
- It was important to communicate the key economic, environmental, and social benefits across council and community that the Strategy generates including:
 - increased resilience of whole community
 - demonstrates leadership and response to community expectations
 - reduces operating costs and saves Council money
 - strategy can act as a tool to leverage funding and enhance innovation

[Watch the recording: Bega's pathway and engagement towards net zero](#)

Community engagement

- Complete a community survey to understand the level of interest and appetite for action on emissions.
- Seek input and engage with community advisory groups or panels.
- Framing a net zero strategy around recent events and shared community experiences can help community relate more to the strategy and strengthen engagement.

Hawkesbury City Council

- Through effective councillor, cross-organisational and community engagement Hawkesbury generated a Net Zero Emissions and Water Efficiency Strategy.
- Council set-up an online survey to understand the existing community actions, the actions they'd like to see moving forward and suggested actions to be included in the Strategy. The survey also gauged current community sentiment towards action on emissions.
- Strategy input workshops with key groups such as Environmental and Waste Committees and the community's Youth Climate Action Group were held.
- The draft strategy was put on public exhibition and email campaigns to stakeholder groups both inside and external to the LGA were implemented to encourage feedback.
- Hawkesbury's community emissions profile is displayed on Council's webpage to provide transparency and information to the community.

[Watch the recording: Getting buy-in for Hawkesbury's Net Zero Emissions Strategy and Water Efficiency Strategy](#)

Want more information?

For more information about generating a net zero emissions strategy, [download the Net Zero Emissions Guidance for NSW Councils \(PDF 1.6MB\)](#) or contact us at netzero@environment.nsw.gov.au.

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