

ADAPTING TO OUR CHANGING LOCAL ENVIRONMENTS

Climate change is one of the greatest social, economic and environmental challenges of our time. Expert scientific evidence confirms that human activity is altering the climate and this is likely to impact across a number of different sectors for current and future generations.

Climate change will lead to water scarcity, more frequent and intense storms, more frequent bushfires, sea level rise, coastal erosion and inundation. Many of these issues will have a direct impact on local governments. Communities will need to understand the risks and adapt to increase their resilience to adverse impacts.

The effects of climate change will have numerous and varying implications for local governments, depending on location and demographic make up. Local government's role in managing these impacts is critical as they cut across all responsibilities, including planning and development, natural resource management, infrastructure, health and recreational facilities. To identify the appropriate adaptation response, a careful assessment of the risks and specific vulnerabilities is required.

Local governments are already taking a number of steps to protect their communities. Risk assessments are being undertaken and adaptation strategies are being developed - such as sustainable urban planning, better building designs and low energy and alternate transport systems.

Water is also a major challenge. Climate change is resulting in wider variability in rainfall patterns with longer periods of low inflows into water storages. Nearly all major Australian cities are already experiencing the effects of reductions in rainfall on water supplies, and the trend is likely to intensify.

Securing rural and urban water supplies for the future is a key challenge for local government. This includes ensuring water supply for communities, managing stormwater and drainage, maintaining parks, public land and swimming pools, ensuring sustainable production systems and providing for other human needs.

What is the capacity of local governments to identify vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, develop adaptation responses and assist communities to adapt to climate change? What tools do they need to do this?

To what extent are local governments already factoring climate change impacts into land use planning and infrastructure investment and are roles and responsibilities clearly defined for local governments in this area?

How can local governments help to secure water supplies in their communities such as through improved water management and recycling?

How are local governments addressing climate change threats to local, regional and nationally significant ecological assets in their planning decisions?



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Climate change

The Australian Government's approach to tackling climate change is based on three pillars:

- reducing Australia's greenhouse gas emissions;
- adapting to the impacts of climate change that we cannot avoid; and
- helping to shape a global solution.

The Government has committed to reducing Australia's greenhouse gas emissions by 60 per cent on 2000 levels by 2050. The central policy for achieving this will be the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. The CPRS will set a cap on Australia's emissions and introduce a carbon price. It will be one of the most significant transformations to the Australian economy ever undertaken. The Government has also set a target to increase the use of renewable energy to 20 per cent of national electricity supply by 2020. The Government is also taking action to improve energy efficiency for households, schools and businesses; and is investing in sustainable agricultural practices to reduce emissions.

Work is also occurring through COAG to accelerate implementation of the National Climate Change Adaptation Framework adopted by COAG in April 2007. Programs in place to build Australia's capacity to adapt to the impacts of climate change include the Climate Change Adaptation Program, which is delivering key information and tools to help decision-makers understand and manage likely climate change impacts. The new Adaptation Research Facility, hosted by Griffith University, and the CSIRO Adaptation Research Flagship will drive research to address key knowledge gaps currently constraining effective adaptation.

Local governments will have a significant role in assisting households and businesses to transition to a low carbon economy and to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Water

Australia faces major challenges in ensuring sustainable water supply in the face of climate change and rising demand for water. In response, the Australian Government is providing national leadership through the Water for the Future plan: a \$12.9 billion investment in four priority areas:

- **Taking action on climate change:** to accurately monitor, assess and forecast the availability, condition and use of our water resources.
- **Using water wisely:** to invest in key rural water projects to upgrade irrigation infrastructure; help households and surf lifesaving clubs save drinking water; and support high water use businesses to be more water-wise.
- **Securing water supplies:** to combat reduced rainfall due to climate change by supporting desalination, water recycling and stormwater reuse; and funding practical projects like pipelines, water saving infrastructure and water treatment plants.
- **Healthy rivers and waterways:** improving river health in the Murray Darling Basin by purchasing water entitlements from willing sellers and setting a new, scientifically informed cap on the amount of water that can be taken out of the system.

Caring for our Country

Caring for our Country is the Government's key natural resource management initiative with \$2.25 billion in funding over five years, and aims to ensure Australia's environment is healthy, well-managed, and resilient. Caring for our Country provides funding to regions and local communities through an integrated approach to environmental management.



An Australian Government Initiative

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