

Issues Paper Climate Change

Issue

Climate change presents one of the greatest environmental, social and economic challenges of our time. The global consensus is that climate change is occurring, the increased rate of change is human-induced and that it requires a strategic response to alleviate the worst impacts on communities through both **mitigation** (addressing activities that contribute to human-induced climate change) and **adaptation** (adjusting to climate change impacts that are inevitable) strategies.

Background

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released its Fourth Assessment Report in 2007 which stated that the "*understanding of anthropogenic warming and cooling influences on climate have improved... leading to **very high confidence** that the global net effect of human activities since 1750 has been one of warming*".¹ The Australian Government appears committed to reducing Australia's Greenhouse Gas emissions through its Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme.²

In 1999 Hornsby Council resolved to reduce corporate emissions by 20% below 1995/96 emission levels by 2010. Recently, the target was increased to 30% below 1995/96 levels by 2020.

Current Status

The two policy options open for responding to climate change are mitigation and adaptation. Council has already undertaken measures to mitigate climate change impacts by increasing the energy efficiency of Council properties. Adapting to what many now consider the inevitable consequences of climate change is the next logical response for Council to consider.

Approaches by local government authorities to adapting to climate change will vary significantly due to variations in biophysical and socio-economic conditions that exist between councils and the inherent uncertainty surrounding the magnitude and scope of

climate change impacts. This inherent uncertainty necessitates the adoption of a risk-based approach.

Council has recently prepared a *Climate Change Adaptation Strategic Plan*, which attempts to deal with the concerns about climate change impacts. The plan identifies a set of actions and sub-actions that will aid Council in addressing climate change impacts.

Key Considerations

The *Climate Change Adaptation Strategic Plan* will allow Council to optimise the allocation of resources to implement adaptation actions and proposes the implementation of a works program which addresses the high-priority actions identified in the plan. These investigations will better define the impacts and also the preferred course of action to deal with those impacts. It is anticipated that the results of the investigations will raise some expenditure issues that will need to be addressed during the next 10 years. Failure to fund the proposed work resulting from the investigations may not only result in Council's liability increasing but contribute to the impacts of climate change on the Shire.

Next Steps

Hornsby Shire Council considers that it is important to engage the community in order to develop a coherent future direction for combating climate change. This would address the determination of appropriate and achievable measures for addressing both mitigation and adaptation strategies. The key challenge for Council will be the allocation of its limited resources to address issues that present significant environmental, social and economic costs.