**Council Paper for Climate Change  
Commitment Levels**

**ITEM NUMBER** [INSERT NO]

**SUBJECT**                FOR [ENDORSEMENT OR APPROVAL]: Council’s Commitment Level for Climate Action

**AUTHOR**           [INSERT AUTHOR]

**SPONSOR** [INSERT SPONSOR]

**BRIEFING DATE** [INSERT DATE]

**PURPOSE:** To seek Council [ENDORSEMENT OR APPROVAL] for a commitment level in climate change action.

**RECOMMENDATION**

(a)    **That** Council [endorse OR approve] the commitment level [insert commitment level, i.e ‘leading’, ‘motivated’, or ‘committed’] for Council’s climate change journey.

**BACKGROUND**

1. Recently updated scientific evidence on climate change prepared by the intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change (IPCC, 2021) in “*Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis Summary for Policy Makers*”, show that the CO2 concentrations in the atmosphere are higher than anytime in the last two million years, and that it is unequivocal that humans have caused warming of the atmosphere, ocean and land.
2. The United Nations’ (UN) Secretary-General António Guterres’ called the IPCC (2021) Report a ‘code red for humanity’ advising that “*The alarm bells are deafening, and the evidence is irrefutable: greenhouse‑gas emissions from fossil-fuel burning and deforestation are choking our planet and putting billions of people at immediate risk. Global heating is affecting every region on Earth, with many of the changes becoming irreversible*.” (UN Press release: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sgsm20847.doc.htm>)
3. The target set in the 2015 Paris agreement of limiting warming to 2 degrees - preferably 1.5 degrees, will be exceeded during the 21st century unless deep reductions in greenhouse gas emissions occur in the coming decades.
4. [Insert a brief summary of Council specific climate change measures and progress to date]

**REPORT**

1. A user-friendly support package, with an aim to assist Councils’ embed climate action as business-as-usual (BAU) through their Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) documents, was prepared by Hunter Joint Organisation for the 11 Councils in the Hunter and Central Coast Regions.
2. The package provides an efficient way for Councils to establish a holistic climate change journey. During the preparation of the package, consultation was held with representatives from Councils’ IP&R staff, climate change staff, executive leaders, and an interorganisational panel of climate change experts.
3. The package is based on relevant guidelines and best practice, and aligns with the framework and timeline for the overarching IP&R documents - Community Strategic Plan, Delivery Program, and Operational Plan. It provides a pathway for Councils’ decision makers to determine their climate change commitment level, and to embed the associated principles and actions into the IP&R documents, with the support of IP&R and climate change staff.
4. Commitment levels were developed to support Councils establish their vision and identity for their climate change journey. It provides a typical, but not binding, narrative giving the general direction of the commitment level.
5. The concept of commitment levels was developed to support the discussions within Councils and is targeted at decision makers when setting the scene for their strategy development.
6. The commitment levels are usually linked to resources available for a particular Council, but also the level of risk and opportunity for the particular Local Government Area (LGA), and the community’s values.
7. The three commitment levels are described in below tables.

| **Commitment**  **Level** | **Thought Leaders** | **Typical Narrative** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Leading | Thought Leaders  Innovators  Influencers  Active Drivers  Change Agents | Leading Councils declare a climate crisis, or acknowledges climate change, in the introduction of their IP&R documentation and follow up with dedicated programs and resources to prioritise and act on risks and opportunities.    The organisational culture is one that values and incorporates intergenerational equity into decision making. Council engages and empowers staff and community to contribute to the action plan.  There is a clear and effective governance structure with strong executive sponsorship, a dedicated and accountable climate change risk manager or climate change / sustainability team, organisation wide champions, and a well-defined change management program to ensure climate change is embedded in decision making for both planning and operational functions. They link climate change with other strategic focus areas in a sophisticated manner, allowing for benefits to multiple programs and efficient use of resources and funding.  These Councils lead by example. They understand their communities climate risks and needs, and drive large scale behaviour change programs with targeted campaigns to influence community action.  Climate change is a focus area in corporate innovation, and research and development programs. A leading Council identifies critical gaps and opportunities, and drives research and innovation to fill them.  These Councils are active members of collaborations such as the Global Covenant of Mayors (GCoM) and / or the C40 cities. They work locally with partnering organisations with whom they share interdependent climate risks and opportunities to reduce emissions.  A leading Council is looked to as a case study, and contributes to conferences and forums as thought leaders. They measure and report their progress regularly and transparently.  The net zero commitment is accompanied by a clear road map with frequent reviews and continuous improvement cycles.  There are opportunities for updates throughout the IP&R cycles in an agile manner reflecting the increasing available information and data associated with the topic and frequent updates in guidance and information. |
| Motivated | Best Practice  Early Adopters  Contributors    Collaborators  Active Participators | Motivated Councils declare a climate crisis or acknowledges climate change in the introduction of their IP&R documentation and follow up with defined projects and programs. They incorporate climate change in their corporate risk assessment and management to prioritise actions in the larger context of Council’s requirements with funding allocated accordingly.  These Councils seek well documented and validated methodologies for best practice climate change risk assessment and action. This is typically done through active participation in collaborations and partnerships to leverage efforts.  The motivated Councils have a dedicated climate change lead or has allocated the responsibility and accountability as an essential part of a wider role. The leadership team is committed and aware with a dedicated sponsor.  Motivated Councils realise the links between programs such as waste reduction, sustainability, disaster resilience etc, and leverage their initiatives to benefit multiple outcomes.  Council empowers their community by adopting validated community campaigns for large scale behaviour change, and participating in campaigns established by partnerships.  A clear road map for net zero emissions is prepared or committed to.  The motivated Councils’ climate change journey has frequent reviews, continuous improvement, and considerations of wider priority areas for the Council embedded in their IP&R cycles. |
| Committed | Opportunistic Participators  Supporters  Complying | A committed Council acknowledges climate change as a risk and that action is required for a resilient community.  These Councils commit to seeking funding and collaboration to enable activities in an opportunistic manner, as dedicated resources are not available internally. Notwithstanding limited resources, a commitment means that climate change is a focus area and Council has strategic backing when seeking funding for programs and projects.  These Councils continuously seek grant funding, and beneficial collaborations and partnerships to leverage efforts and funding. External assistance is essential for the successful delivery of their program.  Climate change is typically a small part of a wider role. Climate change is considered in the corporate risk management framework in the context of other priorities and available resources.  Net zero road map is dependent on external assistance or templates and funding through grants or other types of financial assistance.  These Councils mainly seek opportunities that are cost effective / cost positive and have multiple benefits across several Council focus areas. They leverage efforts already in place for linked strategic focus areas such as waste reduction, energy reduction, disaster resilience etc.  A committed Council reviews their approach to climate change frequently in consideration of grants and partnership made available to them and in line with the IP&R cycle. |

1. Establishing a commitment level provides stakeholders with vision and direction, gives the community confidence that their needs and risks are considered, and that appropriate action will be executed.
2. The commitment levels also support climate change and IP&R staff by providing clarity of direction, boundaries and resources for their work. It establishes a direct link between climate change staff and the decision makers through the mandatory planning and reporting cycle associated with the IP&R framework, which enables a more efficient climate change journey. It encourages leadership at all levels.
3. It is proposed that Council adopts the commitment level [leading OR motivated OR committed] based on [insert Council specific justifications].
4. [Insert how the proposed commitment level aligns with Council’s strategic direction and community values]

**CONSULTATION & TIMING**

1. [Insert Council specific details]

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL**

1. [Insert Council specific financial implications]

**Appendix A. Glossary**

**[Remove terms not used in the paper]**

| **Term** | **Description** |
| --- | --- |
| Adaptation (Climate Change) | Actions that support individuals, communities, organisations and natural systems be resilient to impacts of a changing climate |
| Adaptive Pathways (Climate Change) | A planning approach considering multiple possible futures and various measures for each future, to address the uncertainty associated with climate change projection and decision making |
| Building Back Better | An opportunity to re-build local and global economies with greater emphasis on sustainability principles and sustainable finance when planning the recovery from COVID-19 |
| C40 Cities | A network of the world’s megacities committed to addressing climate change. C40 aim is to supports cities collaborate effectively, share knowledge and drive meaningful, measurable and sustainable action on climate change |
| Carbon Neutral | Carbon emissions and offset units together equals zero |
| Carbon Offset | Activities that reduce greenhouse gas emissions or remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere to compensate for emissions produced elsewhere. In Australia, credible offsets are accredited under the Climate Active Carbon Neutral Standard, formerly National Carbon Offset Standard (NCOS) |
| Carbon Sequestration | Removal of carbon from the atmosphere through biological, chemical, and physical processes, for example through sequestration into plants and soil, planting trees or fast growing plants |
| Circular Economy | An economy that that re-use and recycle materials as much as possible, as opposed to a linear economy of “make, use, dispose” |
| Cities Power Partnership (CPP) | Australia’s largest network of local councils, facilitated by Climate Council, and aiming for a net zero emissions future |
| Climate Change (Human Induced) | Human activities – particularly the burning of fossil fuels over the last 50 years – have released sufficient quantities of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases to trap additional heat in the lower atmosphere and affect the global climate. Results are sea levels rising, glaciers melting and precipitation patterns changing. Extreme weather events are becoming more intense and frequent |
| Climate Positive | Going beyond net zero emissions by removing more greenhouse gases from the atmosphere than emitted |
| Coastal management Programs | Councils set the long-term strategy for the coordinated management of the coast, with a focus on achieving the objects and objectives of the Coastal Management Act 2016 (CM Act) |
| Commitment Level (Climate Change) | Three levels of commitment (leading, motivated and committed) developed to support Councils establish their vision and identity for their climate change journey. The commitment levels are usually linked to resources available for a particular Council, but also the level of risk and opportunity for the particular LGA, and their community’s values |
| Community Strategic Plan | Describes the community’s vision and aspirations for a period of ten of or more years. Creation of the CSP is led by the Mayor and Councillors and through engagement with the community |
| Council Paper | A business paper submitted for Council’s governing body (providing civic leadership) meetings, where issues of public importance are discussed and debated, and decisions are made |
| Delivery Program | A four-year plan that turns the strategic goals found in the Community Strategic Plan into actions. It identifies all the key activities the Council has committed to undertake, and all plans, projects, activities and funding allocations of the Council must be directly linked to the Delivery Program |
| Fossil free | No use of fossil fuels |
| Global Covenant of Mayors (GCoM) for Climate and Energy | A global alliance for city climate leadership, working together towards a resilient and low-emission society |
| Greenhouse Gases | Gases that trap heat in the atmosphere causing climate change, such as carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and fluorinated gases |
| Fossil Fuel Aligned Investment | Assets including stocks, bonds, and other financial instruments connected to companies involved in extracting fossil fuels |
| Fossil Fuel Economy | An economy and community reliant on the extraction and consumption of fossil fuels |
| Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) Framework | A framework directing how Councils in NSW plan, document and report on their plans for the future. It includes a suite of integrated plans that set out a vision and goals and strategic actions to achieve them. It involves a reporting structure for progress and communication to Council and the community, and a structured timeline for review of goals and actions |
| Liability Risk (Climate Change) | Risks associated with compensation sought for losses that may have resulted from climate change |
| Mitigation (Climate Change) | Actions to limit our impact on the climate, either by reducing greenhouse gas emissions or increase the amounts of greenhouse gases removed from the atmosphere by sinks |
| Net Zero Emissions | Typically involve a combination of reducing and offsetting greenhouse gas emissions. The preference is on avoiding and reducing emissions with offsetting as a last step after all other options have been exhausted |
| Operational Plan | A one year plan that identifies the individual projects and activities that will be undertaken in a specific financial year to achieve the commitments made in the four year Delivery Program. The activities of the Operational Plan are enabled by the Resourcing Strategy |
| Paris Agreement | A legally binding international treaty on climate change, with the main aim to limit global warming to well below 2, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels |
| Physical Risk (Climate Change) | Direct physical risks from a changing climate, for example impact on assets from sea level rise, and impacts on the community from bush fires |
| Renewable Energy | Energy from resources that are naturally replenished on a human timescale, such as solar, wind, hydro, tidal and geothermal |
| Resilience (Climate Change) | Embedded adaptation and mitigation measures that eliminates or reduces the severity and effects of shocks and stresses on environmental, social and economical systems |
| Shocks (Climate Change) | Acute events, e.g. bushfires and floods |
| Sink (Climate Change) | Greenhouse gases are removed from the atmosphere by for example carbon sequestration into the soil, or by planting trees |
| Stresses (Climate Change) | Chronic impacts, e.g. droughts, change in habitat |
| System Thinking | An approach commonly emphasised in climate change action discussions, based on viewing a system in a holistic manner as opposed to its components individually. Linkages and interactions are considered essential to understanding problems and solutions in system thinking |
| Transitional Risk and Opportunities (Climate Change) | Risks and opportunities associated with the changes needed in society to adapt and mitigate climate change, for example impacts on Council from legislative changes, risks to reputation from lack of action, and changes in markets towards renewable energy |
| Vulnerability (Climate Change) | The degree to which a system is susceptible to, and unable to cope with, adverse effects of climate change |