
Local-first implementation

**Why a strong climate
declaration is needed – *at the
local government level* – and
what it can do**

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1. Introduction

This paper is a working draft that explores one potential meta-strategy for climate campaigning to get society into emergency mode with a focus on Climate Emergency Declarations by local councils.

It has been written for two different types of reader:

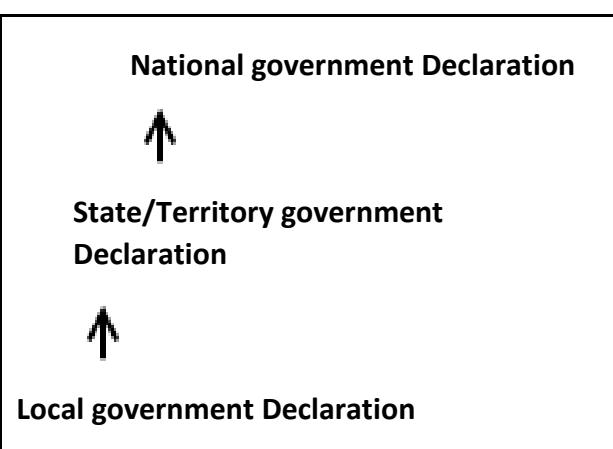
- climate ***campaigners***, and
- local government ***Councillors and staff*** working ***actively*** on the Climate Emergency Declaration.

2. The core ideas

Two critical purposes for getting local councils to declare a Climate Emergency are to:

- create a campaigning ***beachhead***¹ from which to get the nation and the world to declare a climate emergency (that would drive the necessary action to solve the problem at emergency speed); and
- build a broadly-based societal commitment to ***fully-adequate climate goals*** and commensurate follow-on action.

The campaign to get Councils to make a formal, strong climate emergency declaration is built on the strategic ***assumption***² that the fastest way to get national and international climate emergency declarations in place is to ***start first with local government and then push the commitment up to the state/territory government and then to the national government***.



¹ A starting place from which to commence a wider campaign.

² There could potentially be many different meta-strategies that could enable a country to get into climate emergency mode. This paper develops one meta-strategy. Since we can't be absolutely sure which meta-strategy will work the best, it might be a good idea for more than one to be pursued.

The **first Councils** able to respond to this strategy will be those where the local community and the Council majority are very committed to very strong action on climate.

At the local government level, there needs to be a **seven part action plan** that can be thought of as working in three directions – **upwards, outwards and downwards**:

Upwards:

- Pushing the Climate Emergency Declaration commitment to the State and National Governments and encouraging ongoing policy and action improvement;
- Temporarily filling critical gaps in the overall climate emergency program until the State/Territory and National Governments take up their climate emergency responsibilities;
- Contributing to state/territory/national, global action.

Outwards:

- Reaching out to build support for a Climate Emergency Declaration commitment from other local Governments;
- Encouraging networks that extend beyond the municipality to engage with climate in emergency mode (social/ethnic, professional, activist, business).



Downwards:

- Growing and maintaining a strong democratic mandate for the Climate Emergency Declaration commitment and building the climate emergency action culture;
- Acting locally to deliver Climate Emergency Declaration solutions (physical and behavioural).

The critical urgency of getting a national Climate Emergency Declaration means that the upwards and outwards programs need to

have very high priority **early on**. To secure these efforts it is also critical to build and maintain the democratic mandate. Once the state/territory and national governments have made their own Climate Emergency Declarations, then the critical priority for the Council is to locally deliver the full climate **solutions** at emergency speed.

The success of the meta-strategy explored in this paper depends on **building a strong democratic mandate** reinforced by **strong support from the non-fossil fuel elites**.

3. Why emergency mode?

The value of emergency mode for delivering climate action is that it goes beyond business-as-usual and reform-as-usual. Special features of this mode are:

- a very strong **focus** on the issue causing the emergency;
- a strong **priority** for action and budgets relating to the issue causing the emergency;
- **special powers** (if needed);
- delivery of solutions as a **package** (rather than piecemeal, incremental change);
- delivery of solutions in a **strong enough** way to end the emergency condition ; and
- delivery of **temporary protection** and **adaptation measures** while prevention and restorative measures are put in place and while they achieve their full effect.

(See the action checklist for a climate emergency program in Appendix 2.)

4. Why a Declaration?

The aim of the Climate Emergency Declaration campaign is to get society into emergency mode for long enough to restructure the economy so that we can provide people and (the rest of) nature with maximum protection from the impacts of climate change.

There are undoubtedly a great many pathways to this outcome, so why should we interested in having a climate emergency **declaration**?

Although humans appear to have an evolved capacity to operate at times in emergency mode, there needs to be a strong social signalling process to help trigger this mode shift – both psychologically and administratively.

(Section 5 outlines what a Climate Emergency Declaration could do.)

5. Is a rhetorical Declaration good enough?

A purely rhetorical style of declaration is very unlikely to work. The substantive action that needs to follow a climate emergency declaration is so strong that implementation will be difficult and very demanding, so there will be a very strong temptation for governments to water down the implementation.

For that reason the declaration needs to be formal (in writing), public and detailed so that the consequent action is unambiguous at a practical level and the commitment is clear and strongly intended.

These requirements imply that a considerable amount of preparation is needed before the formal declaration of a climate emergency. *(See especially Section 15 [procedural steps] and Section 20 [mandate].)*

6. What should a Declaration do?

A Climate Emergency Declaration needs to make clear:

- what outcomes are expected to flow from the declaration action;
- any special powers that are switched on by the declaration;
- any limitations that are placed on the emergency mode flowing from the declaration eg. any time limits and what governs any change to the time limits.

7. Why a time-limited Declaration?

It is usual, around the world, to time-limit formal emergencies. This is precisely because emergency modes are not business-as-usual. They are special modes of social action to fix serious and demanding problems so that a desirable normality can be restored. People are unlikely to accept the necessary priority shifts, time and resource commitments and intensity of emergency action if it is not time limited. (The period of application of an emergency can usually be extended via a formal, transparent process if this is needed.)

8. Why start the implementation of Declarations with local government?

The implementation action flowing from a local government Climate Emergency Declaration cannot attain full strength until State/Territory and Federal Climate Emergency Declarations are in place as well (see Appendix 1). So why start the **practical implementation** of the Declaration process at the local government level?

A big, complex demand that has to be delivered as a package is hard to make politically real for most people because they have only ever experienced incremental change. Furthermore most people do not relate well to abstract ideas and for something to be 'real' it has to be seen (or imagined) at a practical level. So we have a paradox – ideally the Declaration needs to have been adopted already for most people to be reassured that it is a good idea to support it.³

So it will work better to commence the campaign for implementation in an area where people are most strongly convinced about climate change, are most inclined towards big picture thinking and have the greatest sense of agency, and where the fossil fuel industry has the weakest grip on the community. The areas where these criteria are met, ie. where early wins are possible, will be fairly circumscribed and so are likely to match local (rather than state/territory) government areas best.

Another reason to begin **implementing** the Climate Emergency Declaration process at the local government level is that, in terms of power politics, expecting a national government that presides over the world's

³ (Geoffrey Moore deals well with this challenge in a business setting in his book "*Crossing the Chasm*".)

largest coal exports to be the first level of government to lead with a climate emergency response program is unrealistic until a strong power base in the community and among the non-fossil fuel elites has been built. But building a strong power base depends in part on the demonstration effect of early wins and these will only come at the local government or small state/territory level.

(There are however strong *educational* reasons to call on the national and state/territory governments, from the beginning of the campaign, to declare a climate emergency, but we shouldn't expect that the national or even the state/territory⁴ level of government to be the first to begin *implementation*.)

Once early wins are achieved then people who are inclined to follow rather than lead will be more readily convinced that an emergency response is feasible. Plus as campaigners we can improve in stages our ability to engage people – especially those who are less switched on at the outset.

Another campaigning dynamic assisted by starting at the local government level is the boost that early wins give to the sense of campaign momentum ie. the feeling that campaign effort delivers campaign results fairly soon and that campaign results will keep accumulating until the complete campaign outcome is achieved.

9. Why should local government Declarations be strong from the start?

If the implementation action for local government Climate Emergency Declarations cannot reach full-strength until the State/Territory and Federal Governments also formally declare a climate emergency and launch a commensurate action program, why is it so important for local government Declarations to be strong from the start – rather than rhetorical or light-weight?

This is essential to project the full meaning of the climate emergency action demand – so that the early wins are a real demonstration of the mode of operation we are hoping for, eventually, nationally. Also strong emergency rhetoric will seem empty if the associated actions are not commensurate with the problem. Just “changing the light bulbs” is not enough when we face an emergency problem.

A heavy duty climate Declaration is one that covers all aspects of what a Council should try do in an emergency situation:

- **locally**, within the Council operations and across the community, in relation to not only eliminating greenhouse gas emissions but also in relation to CO₂ drawdown and direct cooling and adaptation;
- **beyond** the border of the local government area to build support for a climate emergency Declaration from other local governments and the other levels of government, across the country and across the world; and
- **to fill gaps** in a full climate emergency program until other levels of government can take up their full responsibility.

The last two dot points are essential to gain the maximum momentum from the action taken by local governments.

⁴ The one possible exception to this is the Australian Capital Territory.

10. Avoiding parochialism

Local governments have local responsibilities, but they can play a part in regional, national and international leadership. And in the case of the Declaration campaign it is critical for local councils to play a very strong, non-parochial part in building national and international commitment as fast as possible. Some ways to limit parochialism are to:

- move as fast as possible to engage more than one council in the Declaration effort and to engage council across Australia;
- actively engage councils in promoting the Declaration idea to the state/territory level of government;
- win support for the Declaration from one of the smaller states or territories as soon as possible; and
- get councils to actively take on key roles that later might be best undertaken by the state/territory or national government but that are necessary for establishing the Declaration goals and scope of action. (See Appendix 2 when the content is added.)

11. Whole-in-the-parts management

In hierarchically specialised societies and organisations that are controlled top-down, if the top of the hierarchy fails to function properly there is no way to restore adequate functioning of the whole system if elements lower in the hierarchy lack the perspective needed to see what is going wrong and what needs to be done to correct the problem and they fail to develop upward power.

One way to safeguard the whole society or organisation is to encourage people and social units at all levels to have some understanding of how all the parts of the society or organisation need to operate and to develop a philosophy of responsibility and engagement so that each part takes action to help rectify problems in other parts of the society or organisation.

An example of this principle in action was the decision in April 2007 for the Victorian State Government (in cooperation with other State and Territory governments) to commission the first national Garnaut Review of the climate issue. With the election in November 2007 of a national government that intended to be proactive on climate, the Review was transferred to the national level. This model should be applied to the Climate Emergency Declaration when initiated at the local government level.

12. Acting on a complete climate package

A key strength of campaigning to go into emergency mode is that all the things that need to be done to restore a safe climate and provide maximum protection are done as an integrated package at great speed. The number of things that need to be done simultaneously or in short order to achieve maximum protection can be quite overwhelming for most people, so it can be quite empowering to bundle everything into a package and promote the package as a whole.

However when the time comes for the full contents of the package to be delivered, the people framing the Climate Emergency Declaration and the associated action program must deal with the full scope of the package. If climate action groups want to ensure that the implementation process doesn't result in a watering down of the original intent, then these groups must have at least some activists who can engage with the full scope of the package too.

(The package of measures will be delivered during phase C of the change process mapped in the next section. See also the action checklist in Appendix 2 that covers the full package.)

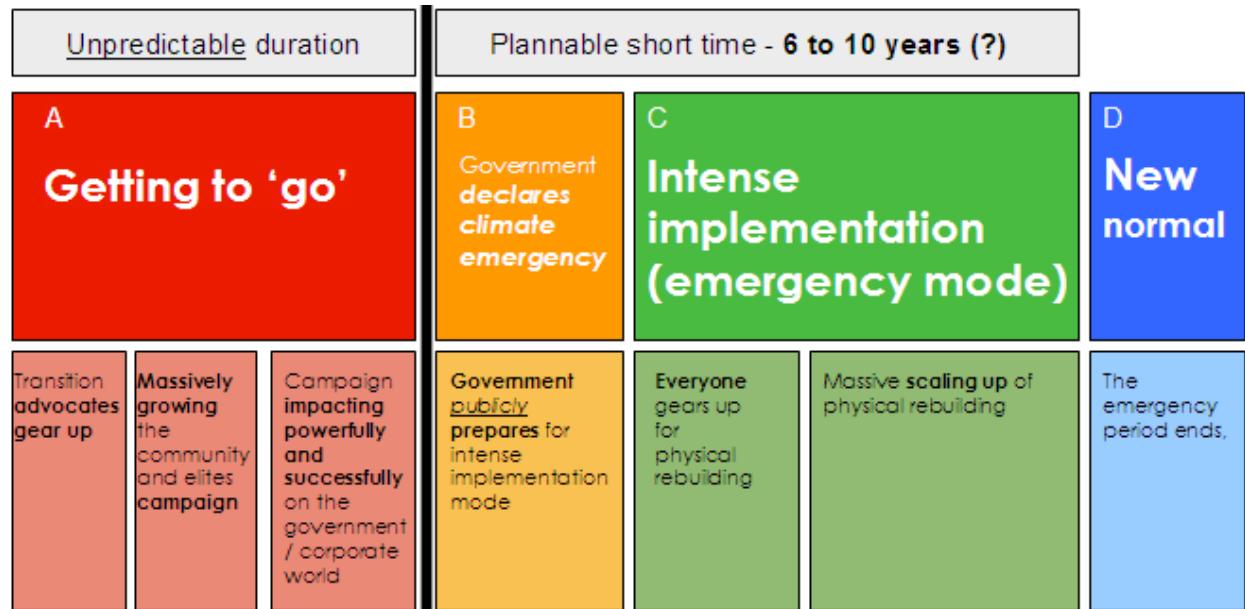
13. Messaging about the climate emergency package

The purpose of the climate emergency approach is to trigger a shift out of business-as-usual and reform-as-usual – to enable the achievement of extraordinary results in the face of an extraordinary climate change threat. Goals and actions need to meet the double-practicality test:

- The chosen action goals need to be strong enough to deliver the degree of protection that is desired (practicality 1); and
- The action program needs to fully deliver the goals in the real world (practicality 2).

When communicating about the emergency program it is vital not to normalise the program so that it begins to feel like reform-as-usual. Messaging of goals and actions needs to maintain their full strength (scale, urgency and purpose). Messaging also needs to help people rise to the challenge. Terminology needs to reflect the intended program. For example, if the emissions goal is zero, then we shouldn't talk about the "low carbon" strategies because we need "zero emissions" or "zero carbon" strategies.

14. Map of emergency change process



15. Procedural steps for a local government Declaration

It is likely that commitment at the local government level can be built most strongly by going through the following steps:

- **testing-the-waters action** to see if a majority of Councillors will support a motion recognising that we face a climate emergency (eg. a motion of this sort was passed unanimously by the Darebin City Council in December 2016); followed by-
- adopting a formal **Policy** (that leads to/calls for the preparation of a formal Strategy or Plan that spells out the needed actions); followed by-
- adopting a formal **Strategy** or **Plan**, spelling out the program of actions that the Council will undertake, that is linked into the overall Council Plan; followed by-
- a formal **Declaration event** and **Declaration document** that marks the clear commencement of emergency mode and the emergency response program.

It would be possible to wrap up all these elements into a single Council decision, document and event, but this would make success a single win or lose exercise. And it would be harder to recover from outright failure or from an inadequate commitment. It also assumes, improbably, that all the necessary education of activists, the community, Councillors, Council staff occurs before the one make-or-break Council decision.

16. Phases for a local government emergency program

The feasible urgency and scale of action of a local government Climate Emergency program is likely to grow as the following milestones are achieved when:

- a Council is the **first** to have declared a climate emergency;
- there are **other Councils elsewhere** in other parts of the country or in other nations that have declared a climate emergency establishing multiple campaigning **beachheads**;
- there are several Councils that have declared a climate emergency that are working as a **cooperative team** sharing projects, outputs and costs wherever this boost effectiveness;
- there are a **large number** of declaration Councils covering the **main demographics** (left and right leaning, urban and rural, main ethnic groups, etc.);
- the **State/Territory government** has declared a climate emergency;
- the **Federal government** has declared a climate emergency;
- a **large number of nations** have declared a climate emergency;
- basically **all the world** has signed onto a climate emergency declaration (individually or via a revised international treaty).

It might be appropriate to have action phases in the Climate Emergency Program that are triggered by some of these milestones. These phases could be included in the Climate Emergency Declaration Strategy or Plan.

17. Using fully-adequate goals as the foundation for action

It has reached the point where, to meet the ***Paris climate temperature goal*** (ie. “holding the increase in the global average temperature to ***well below 2°C*** above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to ***limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C*** above pre-industrial levels,”) we need to adopt an emergency mode response.

But should we use the Paris climate goals as the basis for our climate emergency response?

The Paris Agreement was the best outcome that could be negotiated amongst all the nations of the world in a context where there is not yet a general understanding that an emergency response is possible. By definition the Paris Agreement, arising from a consensus of all the world’s governments, could not represent a leading-edge position, not least because it had to be signed off by countries that earn major export income from fossil fuels (eg. Saudi Arabia, Australia).

However one of the big achievements of the Paris Agreement was recognition, at last, that a $+2^{\circ}\text{C}$ temperature cap is not safe and not acceptable.

But the Paris Agreement’s best case temperature cap of $+1.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ will **not**:

- prevent the Pacific and Indian Ocean atoll nations from being permanently flooded;
- prevent permanent flooding of low-lying, heavily populated areas (Bangladesh, Vietnam, China, Egypt, etc. where over 100 million people live);
- prevent the destruction of coral reefs around the world including the Great Barrier Reef;
- prevent the mobilisation of the huge carbon stores in the Arctic (that will cause releases of CO₂ and methane that could ***exceed the emissions from all fossil fuels so far***);
- provide food security; and
- provide a foundation for military security and positive peace.

So even the Paris climate goals are not safe (even if achieved)⁵ and we should not base our emergency response on them. Instead our program should be based on fully-adequate goals that would ensure that we can restore a safe climate and that we provide maximum protection for all people and other species, globally, including the most vulnerable.

⁵ *Climate Reality Check*, David Spratt, 2016.
http://media.wix.com/ugd/148cb0_9c80333f46ec4da8a2e8d7ba41886df6.pdf

18. The elements of a Climate Emergency Policy

It is likely to be easier to develop a Strategy or Plan for a Climate Emergency Program if the policy framework is clarified first.

A Climate Emergency Policy for maximum protection needs to cover at least the following elements:

- What, globally and locally, do we want to **protect** by restoring a safe climate fast? (RSTI's approach is to provide (with high reliability) maximum protection for the world's people and other species, especially for the most vulnerable majority.)
- With what degree of **certainty** do we want that this protection to be provided?
- What **earth system goals** for climate and ocean acidity should we therefore adopt? (temperature, long run greenhouse gas levels, ocean acidity, speed of attainment)
- What changes need to be made to the **economy** to drive the restoration of a safe climate and ocean acidity? (emissions levels, CO₂ drawdown levels, anything else?)
- What **measures** should be taken, globally and locally, to protect people, species and ecosystem services while a naturally safe climate is being restored?
- What changes should be made to the **municipal economy and the local lifestyles** etc. to do our share locally?
- What classes of **action and engagement** should the Council and the local community engage in to facilitate the states/territories, the nations and the world to go into climate emergency mode as fast as possible?
- What **complementary action** is needed from the relevant state/territory government and the national government to ensure that the local actions are maximally effective?
- What **phases** of action should the **local council work** through and what goals and policies are appropriate for each phase?

19. The elements of a Climate Emergency Program

Every organisation and level of government has some things it can control and some things it could influence. This distinction should be reflected in the actions that makes up a Climate Emergency program eg.

Area of action	Control	Influence
Promoting the Climate Emergency Declaration to other Councils, the relevant State/Territory and National Governments and to Councils overseas		✓
Educating and mobilising the local community (to have impact locally and beyond)		✓
Filling gaps (on goals, science, education, etc.) until all levels of government are engaged (Garnaut precedent)		✓
Taking local educational and physical action to meet Council's local responsibilities	✓	✓

These elements of a Climate Emergency Program could be contained in a Council Strategy or Plan.

20. Ensuring a secure mandate

Both the Council and climate action groups must take great care to have enough public support to build a secure mandate for each phase of the Climate Emergency Program.

The stronger the goals or stance and the stronger the action program, the stronger and more widely-based the support needs to be. Ultimately, a Climate Emergency program needs a strong democratic mandate (a supermajority) and, pragmatically, it also needs to be supported by the dominant non-fossil fuel elites.

It is risky for the campaign to engage councils in making a climate emergency declaration to be limited to one Council and one area of the country for too long. As soon as possible the campaign should be spread across the country.

A local council and the climate movement wanting to take a strong stand, has to 'do' democracy and elite mobilisation better than the fossil fuel industry – both within the local government area and beyond.

Appendix 1: Why state/territory & national Declarations boost the effectiveness of local government Declarations

The implementation action flowing from a local government Climate Emergency Declaration cannot attain full strength until State/Territory and Federal Climate Emergency Declarations are in place as well. Some of the reasons are that:

- until the State/Territory and Federal government have joined local government in declaring a climate emergency, the community will be getting mixed messages, and so it will be harder to get the necessary supermajority of strong support for all the full-strength actions that local governments will need to be taking in order for a safe climate to be restored at emergency speed;
- a good deal of the revenue for local governments comes from the State/Territory and Federal governments and the flow of money to local governments is likely to increase;
- many innovative technologies and methods that local government will want to apply will only become available as a consequence of State/Territory and Federal government funded programs;
- there will be greater synergy between government programs at all levels – once all levels of government have declared a climate emergency – because the programs of each level of government will have been designed for the same purpose; and
- some functions taken on early (of necessity) by local councils would be more efficiently carried out by a higher level of government and can now be transferred to the most appropriate level of government.

These limitations notwithstanding, there is still a great deal that a local council can do even if it declares a climate emergency ahead of its state or territory or national government.

Appendix 2:

Expanded action checklist for a Council climate emergency program

How to interpret the table below: The table has a left section made up of 5 columns that relate specifically to a Council climate emergency program. The four columns on the right show, with a variable number of ticks **across each row**, the degree to which each level of government is likely to be engaged with the types of action identified once all levels of government are actively implementing a climate emergency program. More ticks indicates more involvement.

Council climate emergency program			Eventual levels for action			
Types of action	Areas	Modes of action	Local level	State / Territory level	National level	Global level
Fast global outreach ⁶			✓✓ ⁷	✓✓	✓✓	—
Principle of maximum protection			✓	✓	✓	✓✓
Protection for who/ what? ⁸	People	Ethical concern Enlightened self-interest Local / global	✓	✓	✓	✓✓
	Other species					
	Anything else?					
How secure? (probable ⁹)			✓	✓	✓	✓✓

⁶ The purpose of the fast global outreach is to catalyse the Climate Emergency Declaration campaign in as many countries as possible, as soon as possible.

⁷ This cell in the table refers to the effort made by the Council (that is using this Declaration strategy) to reach out to other local councils within the country and across the world.

⁸ Decide who/what we care about.

⁹ Leading-edge safety practice aims for zero risk – where the risk has serious implications. Run of the mill safety standards aim for 1 in 1000 to 1 in 10,000 chances of serious outcomes. The aviation industry achieves performance that has less than 1 in 1,000,000 fatalities per flight. (The IPCC has normalised a 1 in 3 risk of failure of global climate targets!)

Council climate emergency program			Eventual levels for action			
Types of action	Areas	Modes of action	Local level	State / Territory level	National level	Global level
Problem research (<i>incl. threat assessment</i>)	Earth system ¹⁰ problems		✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓
	Vulnerable people					
	Vulnerable species/ ecosystems					
	Vulnerable ecosystem services					
Goal setting	Preventing further plunge into catastrophe		✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓
	Backing out of current danger					
	Restoring a safe climate ¹¹					

¹⁰ Earth system means the Earth's interacting physical, chemical, and biological processes, involving the system elements of the land (soils, crust and mantle), oceans, atmosphere, ice environments, magnetosphere and living organisms. In the context of the climate issue key elements include: atmospheric levels of greenhouse gases, ocean pH, surface temperature, ocean heat content, ice extent and volume, natural carbon stores.

¹¹ A safe climate is likely to require conditions found in the last couple of thousand years of the Holocene epoch. General references to 'safe climate' should also, for practical purposes, include a safe ocean pH.

Council climate emergency program			Eventual levels for action			
Types of action	Areas	Modes of action	Local level	State / Territory level	National level	Global level
Solution research	Zero emissions ¹²		✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓
	CO ₂ drawdown (& other greenhouse gases?) ¹³					
	Direct cooling (?) ¹⁴					
	Ocean pH restoration (?) ¹⁵					
	Adaptation/Resilience					
Solutions regulation	Assessment		✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
	Approval/ rejection					
	Conditions					
	Enforcement					
Education			✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓
Mobilisation (of people)			✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓

¹² For any temperature target at or below 1.5°C there is no longer a carbon budget left, and so the emission target should be zero immediately.

¹³ It is likely that CO₂ drawdown using methods that rely on photosynthesis cannot be scaled up to the needed levels because of competition with food production and nature conservation. It might be possible to use non-biological methods at the needed scale, but it is not known yet whether such methods would deliver a clear net environmental benefit at the needed scale.

¹⁴ Direct cooling via solar reflection methods, would, if combined with zero emissions and massive CO₂ drawdown, achieved at emergency speed, enable the earth temperature to return to safe levels very fast. But we don't know whether solar reflection methods can be applied with a clear net environmental benefit or at an economic cost that can be borne.

¹⁵ It is not known whether ocean pH restoration methods can be applied with a clear net environmental benefit or at an economic cost that can be managed.

Council climate emergency program			Eventual levels for action			
Types of action	Areas	Modes of action	Local level	State / Territory level	National level	Global level
Advocacy	General public		✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓
	Non-fossil fuel elites					
	Other local governments					
	State/territory governments					
	National government					
	International					
Deliberation (public) ¹⁶			✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓
Legislating climate commitment (including the Declaration)	Local government		✓			
	State/territory government			✓		
	National government				✓	
	International					✓

¹⁶ 'Deliberation' in this context refers to large scale 'deliberative polling' involving a large but representative sample of the community who are supported to come together over an extended period of time to work through a complex issue – see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deliberative_opinion_poll#Disadvantages

Council climate emergency program			Eventual levels for action			
Types of action	Areas	Modes of action	Local level	State / Territory level	National level	Global level
Economy – restructuring	Ecosystem services	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> Regulate Invest Design Construct Manage/ operate Decommission </div>	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓
	Nature harvesting (eg. timber, fish, water, & renewable energy)					
	Agriculture (incl. plantations)					
	Minerals & energy extraction					
	Materials processing (including recycling)					
	Complex manufacturing					
	Physical services (infrastructure, transport, environment protection etc.)					
	Human services (including health and care)					
	Information services (including data, research, design, education, media, financial services)					
	Governance services					
	Domestic sector					

Council climate emergency program			Eventual levels for action			
Types of action	Areas	Modes of action	Local level	State / Territory level	National level	Global level
Behaviour change			✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓
Environment protection			✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓
Adaptation/Resilience			✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓
Security & positive peace	Prevention of threats		✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓
	Handling threats					
	Peace building					

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