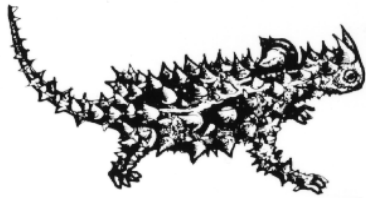


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Alice Springs Town Council Climate Change Action Plan: ALEC Submission

ALEC welcomes the release of the Climate Change Action Plan that outlines a clear and achievable strategy to address the impact of climate change in Alice Springs. The plan provides an accessible and well communicated summary of the current understanding of the science of climate change, the policy and legal context from local, state, national and international perspectives. It places the Council in a strong position to drive the transition towards low carbon economies and inspire community wide change through partnerships and alliances with other organisations, governments and communities.

Climate change is projected to severely impact central Australia, but there is still a high level of uncertainty around how local economies and communities will respond to adapt to this change. Developing this plan is a definitive step forward in accepting the challenges of a warming climate and will enable Alice Springs to be proactive in developing mitigation and adaptation strategies. By significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions and embracing resilience building strategies, Alice Springs could demonstrate to the world best practice climate strategy for arid environments.

Community engagement

ALEC considers that the plan has been written in a way that is engaging, accessible and provides a valuable overview of the projected impacts of climate change. The plan should provide for an ongoing long-term process of community outreach and engagement to continue the discussion on how people living in Alice Springs are already experiencing and coping with climate change. Council is placed in a unique position to work collaboratively across multiple organisations and sectors to canvas the broad range of climate change concerns and develop inclusive strategies for adapting to change.

We suggest that the accessibility of the plan could be improved by developing a two-page executive summary. This summary could outline the projected impacts and the key actions council is taking as well as the most effective mitigation and adaptations strategies. Consultation on the plan is just the beginning of broader community discussions to embed climate change as a key priority for future planning. Council should consult other organisations on the most effective way to engage the diversity of communities and cultures in Alice Springs.

Recommendations and further opportunities

The plan is a progressive and effective starting point for embedding climate action across Council and the community. Nonetheless, ALEC has several recommendations to refine the strategies and targets to ensure the effective and sustainable transition to climate resilient low carbon communities:

Emission reduction strategies

1. ALEC supports developing flexible and achievable targets that will be informed by community consultation. Moving beyond 2021, Council should develop globally-responsible 2030 targets that are consistent with scientific consensus, and eventually commit to net-zero emissions by 2050. This would align with other local councils as well as 'all states and territories except WA,'. According to global scientific consensus this will be necessary to limit global warming to 1.5C (IPCC 2018 p.18). Targets should be clearly articulated and included in an executive summary for community consultation.
2. The discussion of targets is a little confusing; with three different 'target' figures mentioned (12%, 20%, or 30% by 2021 from 2016 levels). This section would benefit from clearly explaining why there are three figures – e.g. is 12% an *agreed minimum* target, with 20% as a *stretch* target, and 30% an aspirational target? It is vital that the plan provides a framework for emission reductions beyond 2021 by formalising a process of decarbonising sectors of the local economy within Council's sphere of influence.
3. Given the huge greenhouse footprint of waste, the Action Plan should prioritise waste reduction strategies. In addition to implementing organic kerbside collection and composting, the action plan could provide for a host of programs that inform households on ways to minimise household waste production. Most people would not be aware that waste is the single greatest source of Council emissions; this indicates an urgent need to educate households on the climate implications of waste management. Informing the community on the progress of kerbside recycling should also be undertaken as a matter of urgency as it remains an issue of high public interest.
4. The plan does not mention the role of investment and finance in reducing emissions. The financial implications of climate change, including transitional and direct risks to investments, are becoming a key strategy for climate action. Committing to climate action therefore necessarily involves a discussion of the investment portfolio of council to ensure there are no finances in high risk fossil fuel enterprises that would compromise the emissions saved from the action plan.

Implementation and advocacy

Facilitating collaboration, cooperation and partnerships across the municipality is essential for effective climate change action that has broad community buy in. Council is uniquely placed to lead by facilitating this collaborative process across the community through public forums, community outreach and the vast array of services already performed by council.

5. While ALEC supports the intent, objectives and targets within the plan, it is not clear how Council intends to operationalise and implement the plan. It is important to promote climate change awareness through formalising the way in which climate change becomes a key factor in Council decision making processes. The plan could be improved by clarifying the mechanisms to implement those actions. This plan could formalise climate change factors using bylaws and amending other policy documents to ensure that the action plan is integrated across all of Councils operations. Regular compliance and

monitoring should be a part of the strategy to demonstrate on-going progress against the targets once they are decided.

6. The Climate Change Action Plan can support several strategic objectives within Council, in addition to objective 3. The following Strategic Plan Objectives could be supported by the Climate Action Plan:
 - 1.2.1: Initiate cooperation between the Commonwealth Government, Northern Territory Government, and Council, to identify and develop strategic opportunities: The action plan therefore has a role to play in development those partnerships and facilitating cooperation necessary for a prosperous community with reliable infrastructure.
 - 1.3: Climate change has implications for providing safe and reliable public infrastructure; extreme weather events are likely to increase road maintenance budgets, improved cycle paths as people chose to drive less and finally, climate change should be a significant consider in the process of developing a Master Plan.
 - 2.1 and 2.2: place making will need to be designed around climate adaptation, green spaces, communal areas that are cooler, water features and more public water sources.
7. Council has an important role to play in advocating for strong climate action. The Action Plan should identify Council's position on issues that concern climate change. Considering that the Council has a position on hydraulic fracturing, the action plan should require Council to act consistent with that position and advocate to prevent any unconventional petroleum development in the Alice Springs region. Having taken a position on fracking, Climate Change action required by the plan should empower Council to advocate for the interests of the community of Alice Springs in preventing the development of an unconventional petroleum industry in the Alice Springs region.
8. The report does not mention fracking at all. This action plan should specifically acknowledge the necessity of transitioning beyond gas and include fracking as an issue for 'Future Considerations' with the action plan.

Local impacts and vulnerabilities

9. The Local effects of Climate Change section should continue to be expanded as our understanding of climate change in central Australia improves. The information on implications for business, agriculture, industry, and Aboriginal communities is limited and has a high degree of uncertainty. A key priority moving forward should be in developing research partnerships with health organisations, research organisations and sectors particularly impacted by climate change to collate information about how the community and economy is responding to change. Climate change will have far reaching and often un-predictable impacts; it is therefore important that this strategy incorporates our understanding as it develops and informs the implementation of the plan. The plan should operate as a living document to be reviewed as our understanding of climate change improves.

10. The Action Plan provides limited attention to the socioeconomic issues of climate change and the vulnerability of certain communities. While the statement that Climate Change will 'exacerbate pre-existing disadvantage and poverty in many Aboriginal Australians in remote communities', is supported, the Plan should expand on this by prioritising strategy that supports the most vulnerable in adapting to change. The benefits resulting from strategy that reduces greenhouse gas emissions should be directed to those who are most in need. Alice Springs is a culturally and economically diverse community which means that there are discrepancies in the vulnerabilities and degrees of exposure to the impacts of change. We need to understand these differences to support those who stand to be most affected in order to build social cohesion and protect health. These differences in vulnerabilities should be further explored through the strategy as it develops, including a process for understanding the health and social implications across the whole town from climate change.

11. While we acknowledge that Council has a duty to reduce greenhouse emissions, they are responsible for, adaptation planning should be a greater priority in the Plan. ALEC considers that adaptation planning is just as important as mitigation in order to maintain wellbeing and liveability. Climate change is already impacting the environment and communities of Alice Springs, so it is therefore an urgent priority for council to encourage adaptation planning across all its operations and provide the infrastructure necessary to maintain social spaces that allow people to cope with climatic extremes.

Conclusion

ALEC is generally supportive of the Alice Springs Town Council Climate Action Plan and encourages the Council to commit to effective climate change strategies. Alice Springs has a lot of potential in developing low carbon enterprises and diversifying the local economy to reduce exposure to the worst impacts of climate change. The plan is just the beginning of a long-term process of transitioning to net zero emissions and supporting communities to adapt to change. ALEC considers it necessary for the plan to place greater emphasis on the need for adaptation planning as the most effective way to maintain wellbeing and liveability.

References

<https://www.ipcc.ch/2018/10/08/summary-for-policymakers-of-ipcc-special-report-on-global-warming-of-1-5c-approved-by-governments/>