



darebin climate action now
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DCAN submission on Darebin City Council Plan (incorporating the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan) 2021-2025

Overall comments on draft planning documents

Darebin Climate Action Now (DCAN) is gravely disappointed in the overall lack of prioritization across the draft planning documents afforded to the serious threats posed by the climate emergency. This is in stark contrast to the information provided in the previous four year plan. DCAN is concerned that the Darebin community will view this as a walking away from the outstanding national and international leadership Darebin Council has provided over the past four years on this issue.

DCAN understands Council's focus on supporting businesses and residents affected by Covid-19. Unfortunately, the effects of climate change continue to bear down upon us and the window of opportunity to avert the worst impacts is closing fast. It is vital, therefore, that Council continues to take a strong leadership role in reducing Darebin's carbon emissions and advocating to all levels of government for strong action. DCAN believes that it is possible to have policy and economic measures that both enable recovery from the pandemic and drive down emissions.

DCAN and the Climate Emergency

Darebin Councillors' unanimous declaration of a Climate Emergency and the adoption of a Climate Emergency Plan (CEP) in 2017 heralded a transformation in how local communities and their elected governments understood the seriousness of climate change in Australia and globally. Darebin's declaration spurred a national, then a global, movement. Today 100 Councils around Australia have declared a climate emergency and 2000 Governments internationally.

Darebin's Climate Emergency Declaration followed a campaign by DCAN and others in the lead-up to the 2016 Council elections. This campaign was

repeated last year, with all elected Councillors declaring or restating their support for climate emergency actions during their campaigns.

DCAN relies on facts and climate science for our campaigns.

The 2017 CEP included an estimate of greenhouse gas emissions in Darebin in 2015/16, as measured by the Snapshot tool used by a large number of Councils in Australia. The estimate on emissions then was 1,155,000 t CO₂e. The most recent estimate for the January-December 2019 period is 1,759,000 t.

(<https://snapshotclimate.com.au/locality/australia/victoria/darebin/>)

Thus, while Darebin Council can be congratulated on achieving a significant reduction in its own GHG emissions over an extended period, emissions across the whole of our Darebin community have risen dramatically by 52%!

DCAN believes the more information that the Darebin Council and the community has available to them, the more Council will be able to engage residents in positive actions to reduce emissions. We recently encouraged Council to consider participation in BZE, ICLEI and Ironbark Sustainability's survey of local and community government climate change targets, strategies, emissions and actions. We believe this survey could be very helpful for Darebin Council to assess, monitor and share its progress to date and future plans for tackling the climate emergency.

2041 Community Vision

DCAN is participating in the Council's development of a 2041 Vision for our community but we believe the next **10 years** (including 2021) are crucial in arresting and reversing climate change and that Council needs to continue to advocate for stronger state and national actions.

This was made very clear recently by Emeritus Professor Will Steffen (ANU), a renowned Australian climate change scientist in an article for The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/failure-is-not-an-option-after-a-lost-decade-on-climate-action-the-2020s-offer-one-last-chance-158913>

Professor Steffen explains why the lion's share of the effort to get to net zero emissions needs to happen *this* decade. "Every fraction of a degree of avoided warming matters, and will be measured in human lives, species and ecosystems saved. The urgent ramping up of our ambition at all levels of our society is fundamental to ensure our children and grandchildren can not only survive but thrive."

Recommendation: That an acknowledgement that we are facing a climate emergency be clearly stated and included in the introduction to all Council planning documents. This acknowledgement needs to include a short explanation about why this is a priority for the community, the extent of the threat and the need for urgent action.

Integration of Darebin Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan

(page 7)

DCAN supports the integration of the Municipal and Public Health and Wellbeing Plan into the four year Council plan. The [Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019-2023](#) recognises that climate change is a *leading threat* to health and wellbeing and [tackling climate change and its impact on health](#) is included as one of four key focus areas in the plan.

DCAN is concerned about the lack of climate change information provided in the draft Darebin Health and Wellbeing profile which was presented to the Council meeting on 8th April 2021. We are concerned that a lack of detailed information on the impacts of climate change on Darebin residents may have resulted in a lack of prioritisation for action under the Strategic Objectives.

The Moreland Council Health and Wellbeing profile, for example, describes the impact of climate change across a broad range of areas including stress, anxiety, domestic violence, food systems, physical activity, urban heat island effect, public transport, information systems, chronic conditions, environmental health, employment, quality housing etc. DCAN would like to see Darebin's profile updated to include the full range of areas that could be impacted.

Recommendation: That the Health and Wellbeing profile report be revised and updated with reference to the full range of issues covered in the Moreland Council profile with reference also to the State Government's guide: <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/climate-change-and-health/municipal-public-health-wellbeing-planning>

Darebin 2041 Community Vision (draft) (Page 8)

DCAN would like to see reference to Council's ongoing commitment to the climate emergency included in the 2041 Vision.

Recommendation: Replace the existing words in the overall vision with: "Darebin is equitable, vibrant, sustainable, green and inclusive. We respect First Nations peoples, our diverse communities and places. We are committed to a multicultural and economically thriving community **living in a climate safe future achieved by taking urgent action on the climate emergency.**"

Recommendation: Under the Sustainable and Green heading: Replace first dot point with "its commitment to a safe climate future for all with "its commitment to urgent action on the climate emergency."

Big Action Items (Page 11)

While there are several items contained in this list that will provide some progress towards the achievement of a safe climate future, it is the mobilisation of the community in support of Council programs together with Council's advocacy to state and national levels of Government that will be more effective in the time available to try and mitigate catastrophic climate events.

Recommendation: Insert a new item at the top of the Big Action Items list: "Continue to inform, upskill and mobilise the community to support urgent action through carbon reduction programs and Council advocacy to state and national levels of Government to achieve net negative emissions by 2030 or earlier."

Strategic Direction: Green and Sustainable (Page 42)

DCAN is concerned that the very first Strategic Objective "Adapt to climate change and build resilience " demonstrates a narrowing of Council's focus to *adaptation*. Adaptation measures are important but must be secondary to taking proactive, mitigating actions to prevent damage occurring in the first place and reducing this damage.

The Local Government Act 2020 strengthened the mandate for the involvement of Councils in considering and managing climate change risk. It also made clear the important role Councils play in both *mitigation* and *adaptation*. The overarching governance principles and supporting principles defined under 9(2)(c) of the Act require Councils to promote the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the municipal district, including ***mitigation*** and planning for climate change risks. Further, under 9(2)(b)

Councils are required to give priority to achieving the best outcomes for the municipal community, including future generations.

DCAN strongly supports the Plan's prioritisation of vulnerable communities. Under this Strategic Direction the term "fuel poverty" has been introduced. DCAN is unaware of its use in previous Council Plans and proposes it be changed to "energy poverty", a term that has widespread use in Australia to explain the situation some households find themselves in with the cost of electricity and gas and better explains actions being proposed.

Recommendations: Replace the wording in the first Strategic Objective with the following: "*Take strong emergency action on mitigating the effects of climate change. Build the resilience of the community and the built environment to the impacts of climate change with a special focus on vulnerable communities at risk of energy poverty and flooding.*"

- Replace "fuel poverty" with "energy poverty" wherever it appears in the draft plan.

Add the following actions to achieve this Strategic Objective:

- Undertake a whole of Council review of existing policies and practices to identify where climate emergency outcomes could be achieved in the areas of mitigation, resilience education and advocacy.
- Continue to inform, upskill and mobilise the community to support urgent action through carbon reduction programs and Council advocacy to state and national levels of Government to achieve net negative emissions by 2030 or earlier.

Budget proposal 1: That funds be allocated in the budget to properly resource a climate emergency education, upskilling and mobilisation program.

Assessment of current and future climate risks

DCAN strongly supports action #225 "Undertake an assessment of current and future climate risks facing the Darebin community..." This action needs to be properly resourced with a funding allocation in the annual budget and a timeframe indicator so that it can feed into the development of the new Climate Emergency Plan.

The Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action published a two volume report on the impacts of climate change in 2016 for all of its member councils (Adaptation in the North - An Integrated Regional Vulnerability Assessment

Vol 1 and 2). The report was based on 2011 census data and Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) data going back to 2007. This report identified vulnerable populations (Vol 1 page 43) and should be updated for current risks with current BOM and census data for Darebin. The results from action #225 could feed into this update.

DCAN also notes that the South East Councils Climate Change Alliance (SECCCA) is undertaking an Asset Vulnerability Assessment project which "will use or develop any required tools to support Councils to demonstrate how Council buildings, drainage and local road assets will be impacted by various climate scenarios". DCAN believes that it would be of great benefit to the Darebin municipality if Council became involved in this project.

Recommendations:

- An indicator be included which ensures that the climate risk assessment is completed in time to feed into the development of the new Climate Emergency Plan.

Budget Proposal 2: A specific allocation be included in the Annual Budget to carry out the assessment of current and future climate risks facing the Darebin community (to support action #225 in the plan).

Strategic Objective: Reduce carbon emissions by switching to renewable energy at a large scale on council buildings and in our community (Page 47)

DCAN strongly supports this Strategic Objective which needs to be properly resourced if it is to be achieved. Council has had great success through its solar programs in increasing the number of homeowners and business owners switching to renewable power. Council has also been purchasing Green electricity for many years and has been leading the development of a statewide Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with other Victorian Councils.

DCAN supports action #103 to extend the PPA to businesses, given the high proportion of commercial and industrial use of electricity and its contribution to Darebin GHG emissions: 45% in 2019 compared to 39% in 2015/16. This will enable businesses to reduce costs and employ more staff from savings gained on energy bills. DCAN would also like to encourage Council to consider extending the PPA to residents who have limited access to purchasing renewable energy such as those living in apartment blocks or renting.

DCAN recommends that Council establish an annual Darebin wide estimate of GHG emissions using the Snapshot tool, starting with a 2020 calculation and publishing results on the Council's website and in community newsletters to enlist the support and participation of the community.

Getting off Gas

The Snapshot tool shows that the use of gas by Darebin households was 12% of total emissions in 2019, which was unchanged since 2015/16. The combined contribution by the commercial/industrial sectors, however, rose by 1% to 8% of total emissions over the same period. Although this may appear to be a small rise it represents a significant part of the growth in Darebin emissions between 2015/16 and 2019.

The Darebin Climate and Environment Reference Group (CERG) – an independent community group established by local MP Ged Kearney - has produced an excellent, well researched flyer "*Make the change to cleaner, cheaper energy*" explaining the urgency of moving away from the use of gas in residential and non-residential buildings. DCAN members participate in the CERG and assisted with researching the content of the flyer (which can be found at www.darebincan.org.au). DCAN encourages Council to review the flyer with a view to including similar content for businesses and residents on the Darebin website. DCAN would also like to see Council exploring how it can collaborate with State-run programs to help Darebin residents move away from gas to renewable energy sources.

Transport

Transport emissions remain high as a proportion of total GHG emissions in Darebin. DCAN commends the commitments in the plan to provide alternatives to private motor vehicle usage. DCAN appreciates that a large proportion of Darebin households currently rely on personal motor vehicles but we want Council to fully take on board that electric vehicles are the future for transport in all forms. Moreland Council has an active program of building charging stations. DCAN encourages Darebin Council to investigate this and put an equivalent program in place. A search for charging stations in Darebin reveals none are local. Charging stations will also encourage people living outside the municipality to visit Darebin, do their shopping and to also visit our many cafes, arts and entertainment venues.

Recommendations:

- That specific performance targets be included instead of % Council energy supplied from renewable sources and % reduction in community wide emissions.

Budget Proposal 3: A specific allocation be included in the budget in order to achieve *large scale* reductions in carbon emissions by Council and the community through switching to renewable energy.

The following actions be included:

- **Budget Proposal 4:** Include an annual Darebin wide estimate of GHG emissions using the Snapshot tool, starting with a 2020 calculation, with results published in community newsletters and on Council's website.
- Amend item #103 to read "Develop and offer businesses and *residents who rent or live in apartment buildings* a group Power Purchase Agreement (similar to our LG project)".
- Continue to explore, invest and assist renters to access renewable energy sources.
- Include information on the Darebin website to assist businesses and residents to move from gas to renewable energy sources.
- Identify partnerships with State Government programs to promote and assist residents to move from gas to renewable energy sources.
- Explore local shared renewable power generation and community battery infrastructure for local businesses and households.
- Explore a rapid roll out of electric vehicle charging stations in Darebin.
- Increase advocacy to the State Government in support of changing building regulations from requiring/incentivising gas connections.

Strategic Direction: Governance, Service and Financial Sustainability

Strategic Objective: Improve the sustainability, accessibility, design of development on private land in the City (page 69)

Yarra Council's Climate Emergency Plan adopted last year included working to introduce zero carbon standards for new commercial and residential developments. Yarra is collaborating with other State Government partners to amend their local planning scheme.

Recommendation: That a new action item be included under this Strategic Objective aimed at developing an equivalent program to Yarra Council's, introducing zero carbon planning standards for new commercial and residential developments in Darebin. That the action item include collaboration with Yarra Council in their advocacy work with State Government agencies.

Budget Proposal 5: Funds be included in the Annual Budget to support the development of zero carbon planning standards for new commercial and residential developments in Darebin, similar to Yarra Council's program.

We look forward to receiving Council's response to our suggestions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ann Sanson', written in a cursive style.

Professor Ann Sanson
Convenor
Darebin Climate Action Now

14 May 2021