Nature Conservation Council
The voice for nature in NSW

CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY 2016
Endorsed on October 23, 2016 at the NCC Annual Conference

The Nature Conservation Council's original Climate Change Policy was endorsed (in principle) by the 1992 NCC Annual Conference and subsequently updated in 2008. This revised version was workshopped at the 2015 NCC Annual Conference and finalised by the Climate and Energy Working Group with input from some Executive members.

1. PRINCIPLES

1.1 Climate change refers to long-lasting changes to world climate patterns such as average temperatures, rainfall and incidence of severe weather events. Changing weather patterns pose existential risks for human and natural systems.

1.2 The current level of anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases is the biggest driver of changing climate patterns including more extreme weather across the world and is ecologically unsustainable.

1.3 The urgent nature of the global threat posed by climate change was recognised by 195 countries plus the European Union at the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, under which the parties, including Australia, have committed to reaching the global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible in an effort to hold the increase in the global average temperature to *'well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels with a view to limiting the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels'*.

1.4 Australia has a special obligation to act given that we are responsible for the highest greenhouse gas emissions per capita in the OECD, and given that our wealth has been partly built on emissions-intensive activities the result of which now threaten life on the planet and especially many poorer nations, including nearby island nations that are the least responsible for emissions.

1.5 The main human sources of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and ocean are:
- energy production;
- mining;
- transport;
- agriculture; forestry and other land use;
- manufacturing; and
- decomposition of organic waste

1.6 Solutions to reduce greenhouse gas levels and combat changing climatic conditions include:

- tackling Australia's emissions at source - stationary energy, transport, mining, land use;
- sequestering greenhouse gases from the atmosphere through increasing biomass and soil carbon;
- using renewable energy sources in preference to fossil fuel sources
- increasing energy efficiencies;
- preventing habitat loss such as native forests and wetlands and supporting their restoration where possible, to increase the carbon dioxide (CO_2) sink;
- reducing meat consumption; and
- reducing population growth and consumption per capita to environmentally sustainable levels.

1.7 NSW has a key role to play in combating climate change and there are a number of solutions that can be implemented at a state level, to keep warming below 2 degrees.

(a) Protect our forests, bushland, wetlands and coastal and marine environments as carbon stores and wildlife havens;

(b) Keep coal and gas in the ground; and

(c) Implement a strong renewable energy target for NSW to drive clean energy investment, and introduce appropriate mechanisms for reaching this target.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THIS POLICY

2.1 To recommend legislation and policy changes by which all levels of government will be able to implement the above solutions.

2.2 To recommend ways our society and its economy can achieve the above solutions as well as measures to mitigate the effects of climate change.

2.3 To recommend ways our member groups can address climate change in their communities.

3. CALL ON GOVERNMENT

The NCC calls on the Federal government to:

3.1 Urgently work with the international scientific community to identify the best ways to keep global warming below 1.5- 2ºC, to meet Australia's obligations under the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement. These pathways will be based on the best available science and with a low probability of overshooting this temperature.

3.2 Commit to reducing Australia's greenhouse gas emissions, and aim for a national net zero carbon dioxide equivalent emissions by 2040.

3.3 Commit to a target of 100% renewable energy by 2030.

3.4 Ensure that any long-term targets are supported by specific interim targets for periods of between one and three years.

The NCC calls on the State and Federal governments to:

3.5 Reduce activities that contribute to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions, such as the clearing of native vegetation including marine vegetation, draining of wetlands and native vegetation, and abolish subsidies for fossil fuel, transport and energy-intensive industries;

3.6 Commit financial and human resources to the development of performance indicators, precise milestones and ongoing monitoring of government performance on reducing emissions, with full public access and right to comment and review the effectiveness of the strategies in meeting the targets; and

3.8 Ensure that the process and the results of any monitoring are open to the public with opportunity for comment and review.

3.9 The targets set out above must be seen as minimum and precautionary and may need to be further tightened if subsequent scientific evidence demands.

4. MORE DETAILED STRATEGIES TO REDUCE GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

Funding for such measures could come from:

- a carbon price in the form of sale of emissions permits in an emissions trading scheme (see 4.1 below);
- the abolition of subsidies to the fossil fuel industries; and
- an equitable tax regime.

4.1 Reinstatement of carbon pollution pricing scheme

The Nature Conservation Council of NSW recommends that a carbon pollution pricing scheme should be introduced, incorporating the following design principles:

(a) 100% auctioning of permits, i.e. no free permits to be allocated.

(b) revenue from the auction of permits should be distributed to:
- investment in research and development in low-carbon technologies low-income households (although assistance to households should be provided in ways that do not blunt the carbon price signal – e.g. through promotion of energy efficiency, renewable energy incentives and increased accessibility to public transport infrastructure);
- finance for retraining and a just transition for coal impacted communities;
- development of education and training for green jobs;
- land stewardship payments; and
- local adaptation measures.

(c) removal of financial assistance to coal-powered electricity generators and removal of diesel fuel rebates for mining sector.

(d) any imported international emissions credits must be additional to the emission cuts Australia needs to make domestically.

(e) complementary measures such as Mandatory Renewable Energy Target (MRET), National Framework for Energy Efficiency, and a Feed-in Tariff are still required (see below at 4.2).

4.2 Stationary Energy Production – Electricity

The Nature Conservation Council of NSW recommends:
4.2.1 Extending the current Mandatory Renewable Energy Target (MRET) for electricity to a minimum of 50% renewable energy generation by 2025 and 100% renewable by 2030.

4.2.2 Legislating a National Renewable Energy Feed-in Tariff (NREFT) that is at parity with the wholesale price and meets the following criteria:

(a) contracts should be made for a minimum of 10 years;
(b) connection of renewable energy must be a priority obligation for the distributor;
(c) qualifying generators must not include those already in operation or already participating in the NREFT scheme – ensuring the tariff applies only to genuinely additional renewable energy; and
(d) Generators predominantly meeting peak loads to receive a substantial premium over the wholesale bulk price.

4.2.3 Decreasing reliance on thermal coal or gas by supporting the development of renewable energy and non-fossil-fuel-based, low-emissions technologies and prioritising the orderly closure of coal power plants starting with the oldest and most polluting. Gas fired power plants should also be closed as renewable energy replaces the need for them.

4.2.4 The use of low risk, renewable sources of energy such as solar, wind, wave and tidal be vigorously promoted by fiscal, regulatory and marketing strategies. Also that geothermal power be still considered as a possible renewable source in the future.

4.2.5 Encouraging the use of energy storage in homes, microgrids and the main network.

4.2.6 Ceasing the extension of the electricity grid by the NSW Government to remote areas of NSW, and instead providing renewable energy and energy storage, which will be more effective in these areas.

4.3 Reduction of energy use

The Nature Conservation Council of NSW urges the Federal Government to set a national energy efficiency target for each year and put in place initiatives to improve efficiency in accordance with the following principles:

4.3.1 The introduction or improvement of energy reduction standards for:
- housing;
- cars;
- appliances;
- public transport; and
- manufacturing.

4.3.2 Improvements to planning guidelines for urban consolidation to include vegetation as a carbon sink and to reduce heat island effects.

4.3.3 The reduction, reuse and recycling of waste products and processing of suitable waste to manufacture products.

4.3.4 The accelerated implementation, tightening and broader coverage of new buildings standards and the appropriate fiscal and other economic incentives and disincentives to accelerate the implementation of such strategies.

4.4 Changes to Transport

Emissions from transport are responsible for about 15% of Australia's national greenhouse pollution.

The Nature Conservation Council of NSW calls for emissions from transport to be reduced through:

4.4.1 a national fuel efficiency standard for vehicles;

4.4.2 town planning and on-line work practices to reduce commuting;

4.4.3 encouraging walking and cycling through safe footpaths and cycleways;

4.4.4 encouraging public transport vehicles powered by renewable energy through **i**ncentives for the purchase of vehicles powered by renewable energy, including the rapid increase of infrastructure for recharging electric vehicles;

4.4.5 more railways within and between cities, including high speed intercity rail links to reduce the use of road and air transport;

4.4.6 development of technology to make all forms of transport cleaner;

4.4.7 the evaluation of all government grants for transport to include an assessment of their greenhouse gas emissions; and

4.4.8 the use by the federal government of conditional federal rail grants (under Section 96 of the Constitution) to promote, and immediately switch priority to, the expansion of rail based freight systems.

4.5 Changes to Agriculture

Agriculture is responsible for 17% of current greenhouse gas emissions in Australia, including most of the methane emissions and a significant proportion of the nitrous oxide.

The Nature Conservation Council of NSW calls for:

4.5.1 the promotion of alternative non-fossil fuel based energy within the agriculture sector.

4.5.2 the introduction of economic incentives for revegetation, and a legislated end to broad-acre clearing of native vegetation as well as an end to all native forest logging on public land. This will increase the store of carbon in the forest.

4.5.3 further research as to the relative contribution of greenhouse gases from the different sectors of agriculture, and research into how these emissions can be measured and reported with a view to including agriculture within the scope of a carbon pollution pricing scheme. This research should be made publicly available.

4.5.4 large-scale revegetation of agricultural lands in the context of Total Catchment Management (TCM).

4.5.5 development of ways to convert genuine waste biomass (e.g. stubble) into energy products or biochar.

4.5.6 the introduction of economic incentives to encourage higher levels of sustainable production in an increasingly variable climate and open markets where all food products must be at least initially offered for domestic sale.

4.6 Changes to Forestry

Forestry is responsible for about 1% of emissions.

The Nature Conservation Council of NSW calls on the NSW government to:

4.6.1 restore native habitat, and legislate an end to broad-acre clearing of native vegetation This will increase the store of carbon in the forest.

4.6.2 end native forest logging.

4.6.3 regenerate degraded areas and improve water catchments.

4.7 Planning

The Nature Conservation Council of NSW calls on all levels of government to:

4.7.1 establish comprehensive zoning plans to co-ordinate development and habitat conservation, including appropriate zones or development controls that protect areas of high conservation value including marine areas.

4.7.2 ensure there is an adequate conservation system of parks, reserves, buffer zones, corridors, botanic gardens, zoos and gene banks for the purpose of maintaining biodiversity in response to climate change.

4.7.3 develop integrated land-use planning systems that enable the sustainable use of present natural resources and limit the expansion of urbanisation and infrastructure development in outer suburban areas.

4.7.4 review local health, building and development codes in terms of their relation to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

4.7.5 develop strategies to cope with predicted effects such as bushfire, flooding, inundation, altered river flows and water supplies.

4.7.6 develop strategies to adapt to predicted effects of sea level rise and increased likeliness of extreme weather events, including coastal erosion, flooding on coastal ecosystems and Aboriginal cultural heritage, ocean acidification, changing ocean currents and temperatures.

The Nature Conservation Council of NSW calls on Local Government within NSW to:

4.7.6 participate in Total Catchment Management planning in order to promote the efficient use of water and the mitigation of the adverse impact of flooding, urban run-off and stormwater disposal in response to predicted instability of rainfall patterns.

4.7.7 water used in mining to be included in water sharing and catchment management planning.

4.7.8 adopt greenhouse gas reduction strategies at a local level including, land use and planning, energy efficiency in buildings, vegetation conservation and tree planting, waste reduction and transport infrastructure.

4.8 Changes to Industry

The Nature Conservation Council of NSW recommends that:

4.8.1 mandatory energy-use reduction targets be set for all industrial and commercial energy consumers.

4.8.2 all such energy consumers be required to carry out an energy audit at least every five years.

4.9 Changes to Mining in Australia

The Nature Conservation Council of NSW calls for:

4.9.1 a moratorium on the startup of new coalmines or new coal seam gas development.

4.9.2 changes to discourage expansion or continuation of existing coal export operations.

The Nature Conservation Council of NSW calls on the Federal Government to:

4.9.3 Legislate to ban political contributions from mining companies and developers.

4.10 Waste Minimisation

As a guiding principle, waste minimisation must apply to resources, energy and humans and energy from waste should not include any native forest materials.

5. INTERNATIONAL AND GLOBAL STRATEGIES

Following the commitment of 195 countries plus the European Union to keeping the global average surface temperature rise to well below 1.5- 2ºC at the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, the Nature Conservation Council of NSW urges the Federal Government to:

5.1 show continued international leadership in reaching the commitments made in the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement.

5.2 urgently work with the international community to identify emissions pathways for developed and developing countries to keep global warming below a 1.5-2ºC increase from the pre-industrial levels, based on the best available science.

5.3 restore funding and focus Australian aid programming to prioritise for energy efficiency, renewable energy and climate change adaptation funding to developing countries, particularly in the Pacific Region.

5.4 provide assistance to developing nations to move to renewable energy systems and to benefit from investment in renewables and carbon offsetting.

5.5 support debt-for-nature swaps with developing countries.

5.6 support large-scale international afforestation and habitat restoration programs.

5.7 participate in aid projects that provide sustainable protection of tropical forests and other endangered habitats through ecotourism, carbon offsetting and other bio services.

6. COMMUNITY AWARENESS

The Nature Conservation Council of NSW urges all:

6.1 to promote community awareness that individuals can make a difference by:

- reducing the amount of energy used in the home;
- using renewable sources of energy;
- decreasing their emissions from cars;
- using public transport instead of cars wherever possible;
- walking or riding a bicycle;
- avoiding products that produce large amounts of emissions in manufacture, e.g. aluminium, or give off GHG, e.g. aerosols;
- refusing, reducing, reusing and recycling products/materials - in that order of priority;
- rejecting unnecessary packaging;
- eating fresh rather than food that has produced excessive emissions, e.g. refrigerated, heated, or preserved foods;
- reducing the amount of meat eaten;
- divesting their investments and superannuation away from fossil fuel industries and their financiers; and
- joining a local community climate action group, No Coal or No CSG group or a community power group.

6.2 to encourage and support local organisations to develop educational and community awareness programs to help people become aware of the environmental and social implications of climate change on their local communities.