

Community Engagement Report

Carbon Neutrality Action Plan 2017-2020

December 2017 – February 2018

Background

In 2008, Council committed to be carbon neutral for its operations by 2020 and in doing so, committed to use resources efficiently and to reduce its contribution to climate change.

Council's Carbon Neutrality Action Plan sets the direction and specifies actions so Council can achieve its commitment to be 'Carbon Neutral' by 2020. Meeting this commitment meets community expectations addressed by Goal 5 - Environment of the Council Plan 2017-2021:

Council and the Bayside community will be environmental stewards, taking action to protect and enhance the natural environment, while balancing appreciation and use with the need to protect natural assets for future generations.

The commitment to develop and implement a Carbon Neutrality Action Plan is made in Council's Environmental Sustainability Framework adopted in May 2016. Achieving 'Carbon Neutrality' is also a demonstration of the Bayside 'Better Place Approach', whereby our dedicated professional people, with an ongoing focus on efficiency, provide core services that improve liveability for the Bayside community.

Carbon neutrality is achieved when the net greenhouse gas emissions associated with an organisation's activities, products, services and events are equal to zero. Achieving this commitment requires that this goal is considered in planning and decision-making across Council's various services, e.g. sustainable infrastructure (design, construction, operations and maintenance) procurement and fleet policy.

Carbon neutrality requires that Council invest resources to avoid, then reduce greenhouse gas emissions, switch to renewable energy sources, and offset residual greenhouse gas emissions as a last resort. As the financial requirement to offset greenhouse gas emissions can be achieved with a range of costs, the acceptability of these costs was presented to the community for comment.

Though Council's commitment to 'Carbon Neutrality' was considered 'non-negotiable' in engaging the community, comment on the Plan and suggested opportunities for improvement were also sought. The message provided in the engagement was that the Carbon Neutrality Action Plan will help minimise Council's contribution to climate change.

Communication and Engagement

The draft Carbon Neutrality Action Plan 2017-2020 was released for consultation on 18 December 2017 to 5 February 2018. This followed review of the draft Plan and approval for release by Council, at a briefing on 5 December 2017.

A Communications and Engagement Plan outlined the community engagement phase of the project. Council conducted a period of public exhibition of the draft Action Plan from 18 December to 5 February 2018. Community feedback was invited through:

- A ‘Have Your Say’ page
- Direct invitation for feedback from key stakeholders, Bayside Climate Change Action group.
- Invitation to ‘Brighter’ newsletter subscribers (Council’s sustainability e-newsletter) to feedback via the ‘Have Your Say’ page
- Direct email correspondence with Sustainability Victoria.

Objective

The primary objective of the Community Engagement was to:

- Educate the community on Council’s commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by 2020
- Identify the level of expenditure on residual greenhouse offsets acceptable to the community
- Seek feedback on the draft Carbon Neutrality Action Plan 2017-2020.

Analysis of Community Engagement

Engagement was targeted at the existing ‘Have Your Say’ page audience and direct community stakeholders in the Bayside Climate Change Action Group.

Community members were provided with a copy of the Draft Plan, and further information on ‘What does being carbon neutral mean?’; ‘What is Council doing to reduce greenhouse emissions?’; and ‘What are carbon offsets?’.

Community members were presented with a table of the type of carbon offsets available for a range of costs, shown in the table below. Community members were then asked to provide a response to survey on ‘What type of offsets would you prefer Council to purchase?’

Offset criteria				
Relative Cost	Standards	Locations	Example	Benefits
Low (e.g. \$1.50)	Purchased from a reputable supplier and/or project and no negative consequences	Overseas	Overseas wind energy, overseas hydropower	Greenhouse gas emissions reductions
Mid-range (e.g. \$8.00)	Purchased from a reputable provider and aligned with other positive outcomes for the environment and communities	Overseas	Overseas forestry projects, energy efficiency, waste diversion projects, agricultural improvement	Social, health outcomes, economic improvements through process improvements and job creation
Most expensive (e.g. \$15.00)	Gold Standard – this certification guarantees the application of certain standards	Victoria	Tree planting, landfill gas	Environment – biodiversity improvement, clean water Economic – projects in regional communities Social -

Table 1. Offset Criteria shown on ‘Have Your Say’ page

As part of the ‘Have Your Say’ process, 39 responses were received and all included a comment on the survey. Only one respondent was not a Bayside resident. Five respondents were BCCAG members, and four respondents were members of Friends Groups in Bayside.

The table below shows the offset criteria supported.

Table 2. Community Preference for Council to purchase offsets from ‘Have Your Say’ page

Relative Cost	No. of Survey Respondents.
Low (e.g. \$1.50 per tonne CO ₂ e)	14
Medium (e.g. \$8.00 per tonne CO ₂ e)	2
High (e.g. \$15.00 per tonne CO ₂ e)	21
Zero	2

Two respondents commented that although they chose ‘Low Cost’ in the survey, there was no option for ‘Zero Cost’. These respondents wished to record that they did not want Council spending any money on greenhouse gas emission offsets.

The responses may be grouped under the following themes.

1) *The purchase of offsets is a waste of Council’s resources*

Several respondents who chose the ‘Low Cost’ option commented that Council money and resources should not be “wasted” on greenhouse gas emission offsets. These respondents do not agree with the concept of offsets and would rather see Council money spent on tangible resources or services.

2) *Any offsets purchased by Council should support local solutions and the Victorian economy*

The respondents who do wish Council to purchase offsets would like to see the co-benefit of supporting the Victorian economy. This means supporting, for example, the planting of trees to offset emissions in Victoria. This also means that the emissions we are generated

3) *Any offsets purchased by Council should meet highest standard of rigour and transparency*

A few respondents recognised that climate change is a global issue and therefore the location of offset projects does not matter, as long as Council is offsetting greenhouse gas emissions to the highest standard of rigour and transparency. BCCAG and one respondent commented that any offsets purchased should meet the National Carbon Offset Standard. Meeting this standard will require offsets at a higher cost. One respondent commented that there is no certainty that this “gold standard” will bring commensurate benefits due to government control, and therefore chose the ‘Medium cost’ option as a balance of rigour and value for money.

Bayside Climate Change Action Group response

A very detailed response was received from the Bayside Climate Change Action Group (BCCAG), which is attached to the Council Report.

BCCAG states that it supports the vision and general principles of the Plan, but has reservations on the resources required for implementation and achieving the vision.

The feedback suggests this is dependent on the budget allocated by Council and the education and training of Council staff to deliver the actions in the Plan.

Other key points raised by BCCAG:

- Purchasing certified renewable electricity, with very low or zero emissions, will reduce Council's greenhouse gas emissions, alleviating the need to purchase greenhouse gas offsets. This strategy may be simpler and more cost-effective.
- Council should explore the bulk purchase of renewable energy with partners (i.e. the South East Councils Climate Change Alliance), using the Melbourne Renewable Energy Project as a model.
- It is uncertain that adequate resources have been provided to achieve carbon neutrality. Given Council's debt-free financial position, BCCAG recommends an additional \$900,000 over 3 years for the Plan, to finance further renewable energy and energy efficiency projects.
- Additional resources are required for Council staff education and awareness of the urgent need to address climate change and deliver this Plan.
- The kerbside waste and recycling service should be included in Council's organisational boundary for greenhouse gas emissions;
- Resources should be allocated to include the requirement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions into leases and permits, and for tenants to report on emissions, to drive more environmentally-friendly behaviour;
- Verification of Council's progress to carbon neutrality should be annual, not every two years, given the timeframe of the Plan.
- Council should join the Cities Power Partnership to access both shared knowledge and resources to track progress towards carbon neutrality.

A response to BCCAG has been provided addressing these points, at the quarterly meeting with Council staff on 9 February.

Sustainability Victoria response

Sustainability Victoria has contacted Council staff to confirm they will be very supportive of Bayside City Council joining the Victorian Government's 'Take 2' program, when the Carbon Neutrality Action Plan is adopted by Council.

Officer responses

Responses were provided by officers to submissions. A sample response to each theme is provided in the table overleaf.

Submission Feedback / Comment	Officer Response
Support and suggestions for the overall draft Plan	Officers thanked community members for support and will consider suggestions to widely communicate the Plan when it is adopted.
Support for local tangible solutions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions	Officers have considered the support for tangible reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, which alleviate the need for greenhouse gas offsets to achieve 'carbon neutrality'. A further action has been included in the Plan to provide flexibility to minimise Council's emissions through the procurement of renewable electricity
Support for purchase of 'High Cost' offsets	Officers have considered the level of support for greenhouse gas offsets (54%), which provide for greater local co-benefits.
Standard of Greenhouse gas emission offsets purchased	Officers will consider the standard and rigour of any greenhouse gas offsets purchased in future required to be met, subject to Council consideration in future budgets.
Objections to the purchase of greenhouse gas offsets and the draft Plan	Officers have considered the level of support for no purchase of greenhouse gas offsets, but note that the Plan will be adopted as a Council commitment from 2008.

A response to the submission from BCCAG is provided as an attachment to the Report.

Summary

Community engagement on the draft Carbon Neutrality Action Plan has shown a mixed level of support for the implementation of the Plan, specifically the use of offsets to achieve carbon neutrality.

The response from Bayside Climate Change Action Group is generally supportive, but has highlighted concerns about the resources allocated and reliance on greenhouse gas offsets to achieve Council's vision of Carbon neutrality.

Based on analysis of community feedback, a further action has been included in the draft Plan. This action will provide flexibility to minimise Council's emissions through the procurement of renewable electricity. This could provide further reductions than quantified and outlined in the draft Plan, and alleviate the need for offsets to reach carbon neutrality in 2020-21.

This addition responds to the concerns of both those who wish to see Council resources spent on physical assets to reduce emissions that support the Victorian economy, in preference to the purchase of "high-cost" offsets that meet rigorous standards.

A further change is the re-allocation of resources for internal staff education, rather the education if users of small leased buildings. With education of both is important, this change is in response to BCCAG's submission that the delivery of the Plan is reliant on greater understanding of the Plan, and the capacity to deliver actions within it, by Council staff.

APPENDIX 1 - ‘Have Your Say’ page content

The ‘Have Your Say’ page was titled: ‘Becoming a carbon neutral Council - Help shape Council's Carbon Neutrality Action Plan’.

Community members were asked to read the copy of the Draft Plan, and further optional information on ‘What does being carbon neutral mean?’; ‘What is Council doing to reduce greenhouse emissions?’; and ‘What are carbon offsets?’ before responding.

Community members were presented with a table of the type of carbon offsets available for a range of costs, shown in the table below. Community members were then asked to provide a response to survey on ‘What type of offsets would you prefer Council to purchase?’

Quick Poll

Carbon Offsets

Even with the proposed investment in energy efficiency, renewable energy and working with building users, contractors and suppliers, there will be some greenhouse gas emissions that Council cannot reduce. To achieve carbon neutrality these remaining emissions will need to be offset. Help Council to select which type of carbon offsets it should purchase.

Offset Criteria

Offset criteria

Relative Cost	Standards	Locations	Example	Benefits
Low (e.g. \$1.50)	Purchased from a reputable supplier and/or project and no negative consequences	Overseas	Overseas wind energy, overseas hydropower	Greenhouse gas emissions reductions
Mid-range (e.g. \$8.00)	Purchased from a reputable provider and aligned with other positive outcomes for the environment and communities	Overseas	Overseas forestry projects, energy efficiency, waste diversion projects, agricultural improvement	Social, health outcomes, economic improvements through process improvements and job creation
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What type of offsets would you prefer Council to purchase? (refer to Offset Diagram above) *

- Low cost (e.g. \$1.50 per tonne)
- Mid-range (e.g. \$8 per tonne)
- High-cost (e.g. \$15 per tonne)

Please describe why you selected the offset criteria? *Required

APPENDIX 2 - Direct feedback from 'Have Your Say' page respondents

The following comments on the draft Plan were received. These have been provided as samples of community feedback. Names have been removed and comments have been grouped under themes. Minor grammatical edits have been made with no alteration of content.

Support and suggestions for the overall draft Plan

The 6 strategic objectives in the Plan are appropriate, practical and measurable. The Council should be commended for the transparency and vision in the Plan.

I have only one suggestion. Please consider joining the Cities Power Partnership involving 35 councils, representing over 3 million people and over 200 towns and cities from around Australia. See <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/cpp>

I am very impressed by what Bayside council is doing and what it has done in its plan to become Carbon Neutral by 2020. The next step is to encourage local residents and businesses to do the same. Also how about aiming for becoming carbon positive? This will help offset other users.

BCC should improve the 'reach' of the CNAP, the better to involve the maximum number of groups and individuals in the commitment to the project's success, and show wider emissions reduction in BCC operations than is currently planned;

Given the uncertainties cited that remain in areas of emissions - and emissions reduction - measurement, and re how much can be achieved in behaviour change, the CNAP needs 'creative flexibility' built in to these final years of implementation of the carbon neutrality commitment. This would allow wiser spending, and greater certainty of its achievement. It could also allow the possible grasping of an opportunity to overshoot the target – i.e. to see BCC a net contributor to Bayside community's and Australia's emissions reduction (beyond its own operational neutrality). Now that would be something to crow about!

The plan has too many 'motherhood' features. We need specific dates to achieve specific quantitative targets, e.g. all council vehicles need to be replaced with electric/hybrid vehicles within three years. It is important that the council sets a credible example for the community.

It would be great to extend efforts to the wider Bayside community, not just Council activities.

I would like to see specific reference to education and awareness-raising on the benefits of walking, cycling (and equivalent carbon-neutral mobility).

Great to see the Council showing leadership on this issue. Note that the greatest potential for reducing carbon emissions by the Council is through influencing local building and transportation outcomes (too many buildings meeting the minimum energy standard!).

Support for local tangible solutions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions

Want to see more support for localised renewable energy and tree planting/habitat restoration. Too many ad hoc ideas. Need a consolidated and long term commitment

Planting trees will have other benefits as well - aesthetic, calming effect on streets, shade for walkers and parked cars, green spaces for people. Landfill is a massive and growing environmental problem, especially in the disposal of plastic and worth tackling.

Support for purchase of 'High Cost' offsets

I believe Australia has the resources and ability to become carbon neutral and a carbon credits exporter. As a result I believe that we should where possible support out local activities.

(High-cost offsets) create jobs for Victorians and the benefits are realised locally.

We have to provide our own solutions!

Standard of Greenhouse gas emission offsets purchased

Will the offsets be consistent with the National Carbon Offset Standard for Organisations? If so, the offsets must comply with the integrity principles are based on the offsets integrity framework for Australian Carbon Credit Units as set out in the Carbon Credits (Carbon Farming Initiative) Act 2011. Local offsets are preferred as they create local benefit. \$15/tonne is relatively cheap. Support our state!

Regrettably, there is no certainty that the Gold Standard option will bring commensurate benefits. Inter-governmental disputation and manoeuvring make it difficult for Councils, industry and concerned citizens to plan effectively.

It is unclear if the Council is intending to secure certification under the National Carbon Offset Standard for Organisations. This is highly recommended as it provides the appropriate level of rigor and transparency.

Objections to the purchase of greenhouse gas offsets and the draft Plan

Council would actually be STUPID to purchase carbon offsets. While the goal should be to achieve carbon neutrality, this should not be pursued by incurring excessive cost. Set the target as zero, work hard to achieve it, but accept that this may be unachievable in the short term.

Absolutely sick of this big con regarding climate, offsets, green etc. Just to get a big tick that looks good in the media and the greenie brigade. Council should be concentrating what they are there for - rates, roads, rubbish

Complete nonsense concept that achieves nothing !!

Council should NOT purchase any offsets. Council should use its best endeavours to minimise its carbon footprint at lowest economic cost and leave it that. The overall ability to reduce emissions further will depend on external factors driven by the state and federal governments. Even after purchasing offsets, council will still emit 8kt CO2e and the "offsets" would likely happen anyway. Not a good economic result. Feel good, but senseless.

DONT WASTE RATES ON THIS, you can buy back land to create parks. Why not do this more often to offset all the apartments that have removed a lot of trees and gardens per house block in the area. Which increases the heat in all the buildings that go up, and lots of concrete. Your planning should make developers offset the carbon.

I don't think the Council should be buying offsets. This is not the role of the Council. Reducing carbon is admirable but it should be undertaken by implementing changes that will have long term healthy and sustainable impacts within the Council's area.

Buy back land with our rates to create parks and plant trees for the increased population you are creating with all the high density which adds to greenhouse.