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# Councils lead the charge on climate ambition, pledging net zero targets by 2030: national report

## Now it’s time for the Australian government to catch up

### The[*2024* *Australian Local Government Climate Review*](https://www.ironbarksustainability.com.au/resources/articles/2024-australian-local-government-climate-review)reveals the vast majority (89%) of 110 surveyed councils (representing 38% of Australia’s population) hold themselves accountable to net zero emission targets ‘generally no later than 2030’.

### More than two thirds (68%) have taken the next step to set or plan community-wide emissions targets.

### These local efforts are substantial. Councils’ targets alone are projected to ‘cover 29% of Australia’s current emissions targets’, highlighting their crucial – but largely unsung – role in driving national climate ambition to align with the Paris Agreement target of limiting global warming to 1.5°C.

Councils across Australia have taken climate action into their own hands since the late 1990s, driving grassroots change and community-focused mitigation and adaptation strategies that hold vital lessons in the global race to stem global warming.

Released today, ahead of the [**Better Futures Forum**](https://www.betterfutures.org.au/forum) (10-11 September), Australia’s largest multi-sectoral gathering on climate, the *2024 Australian Local Government Climate Review* underscores how councils are uniquely positioned to drive meaningful change as trusted first responders to climate impacts on their doorstep.

The report notes: “In 2007, while many state and federal governments were trying to wrap their heads around how to tackle the climate challenge and reduce emissions, 240 Australian councils, representing 84% of Australia’s population, were already taking action.”

Today, councils demonstrate greater climate ambition than the Australian government. As outlined in the report, 89% of 110 surveyed councils hold themselves accountable to net zero emission targets ‘generally no later than 2030’.

By contrast, the federal government’s target currently commits Australia to reducing emissions to 43% below 2005 levels by 2030, with [**calls for it to ratchet this up to 75% and reach net zero emissions by 2035**](https://www.betterfutures.org.au/open_letter_bowen) ahead of the United Nations’ February 2025 deadline for upgraded national climate plans, known as Nationally Determined Contributions or NDCs.

“As the world stands at a pivotal moment in mitigating climate change, Australia can learn valuable lessons from the transformational actions happening locally,” says Lisa Cliff, Director of the Better Futures Australia program, bringing together public and private sector leaders to showcase Australia’s readiness for an ambitious national response to climate change.

“The *2024 Australian Local Government Climate Review* provides a snapshot of what councils are doing across every state and territory – adopting serious climate policy and empowering local communities to participate in socially inclusive and economically responsible solutions that pave the way for a cleaner, safer Australia.

“Now, it’s time for the Australian government to catch up and align its policies with measures already adopted at a local level.”

The report, first launched in 2018 and now in its third iteration, is produced by Ironbark Sustainability in collaboration with Better Futures Australia and ICLEI Oceania. View full report [here](https://www.ironbarksustainability.com.au/resources/articles/2024-australian-local-government-climate-review).

Author Imogen Jubb, Climate Program Manager at Ironbark Sustainability, said its findings outline ‘the crucial role of local councils in Australia’s net zero plan’, providing evidence-based examples for a multilevel governance approach to climate action, ensuring that national strategies are adequately supported by policies, resources, and collaborative efforts.

“Despite Australia’s position as one of the largest exporters of fossil fuels and per-capita emitters of greenhouse gases, councils work hard to drive effective emissions reduction and prepare communities for climate impacts,” Imogen says. “Local governments are the unsung heroes, quietly spearheading climate action for decades… all without adequate resourcing.”

According to the report, around 30% of councils have ‘no budget at all’ to reduce corporate emissions, while the remainder (outside capital cities) access median budgets ‘well under $100,000’. Separately, two thirds of councils have no allocated budget to reduce community-wide emissions.

Imogen said partnering with councils presents one of the most efficient ways for state and federal governments to implement successful climate programs and achieve positive outcomes.

The *2024 Australian Local Government Climate Review* casts a spotlight on ways councils are driving tangible climate solutions that align with the Australian government’s [sectoral emissions pathways](https://www.climatechangeauthority.gov.au/sector-pathways-review). These pathways aim to steer the nation towards a net zero economy by 2050 across six key sectors: electricity and energy; transport; industry and waste; agriculture and land; resources; and the built environment.

The report presents real world examples of how local governments are best placed to implement activities in these sectors, with state and federal government support. Partnering with local governments will also enable sector plans that are socially inclusive and equitable, and benefits are shared by all while shielding the vulnerable from disproportionate costs.

It also highlights several modelled intervention programs that local government could implement for a 5-7% reduction in emissions across the community, including:

* Solar PV adoption in lagging sectors.
* Facilitating community access to power purchase agreements (PPAs).
* Increasing EV and active transport infrastructure.

And it details how council engagement with key stakeholders (encouraging them to adopt and pursue ambitious targets) can further reduce emissions by 6-10% across the community. Together, these intervention and community engagement programs suggest councils can support community-wide emissions reduction pathways upwards of 15% by 2035 above business-as-usual projections.

**Available for interviews:**

* Imogen Jubb, Climate Program Manager at Ironbark Sustainability
* Anna Reynolds, Lord Mayor of Hobart
* Lisa Cliff, Director at Better Futures Australia

The *2024 Australian Local Government Climate Review* will be officially launched by Anna Reynolds, Lord Mayor of Hobart, during a Climate Leaders Dinner at the National Arboretum (10 September), attended by Kristy McBain MP, Federal Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories.  
 **Better Futures Forum 2024** (10-11 September) is Australia’s largest multi-sectoral conference on climate, bringing together a cross-section of community voices, sector innovators and policymakers in the race to build a sustainable, resilient net zero world. *One that leaves nobody behind*. Staged at Canberra’s National Film and Sound Archive, the forum is the flagship event of Better Futures Australia, a network of climate champions and partners representing more than seven million Australians from every sector of society and the economy.

Full list of speakers at <https://www.betterfutures.org.au/full_lineup_2024>, and program at <https://www.betterfutures.org.au/full_program_2024>.

All sessions are open to media. For more information and media accreditation contact: Shelley Thomas, [shelley@scienceinpublic.com.au](mailto:shelley@scienceinpublic.com.au) / 0416 377 444 or Niall Byrne, [niall@scienceinpublic.com.au](mailto:niall@scienceinpublic.com.au) / 0417 131 977