The Ask: Local Governments Calling on the Australian Federal Government

On behalf of ICLEI Oceania, Cities Power Partnership, Climate Emergency Australia, the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy, Better Futures Australia, ClimateWorks Centre and Melbourne Centre for Cities, representing 204 Australian councils covering 76% of the population\(^1\), by the United Nations Climate Conference COP27 Sharm El-Sheikh, local governments call on the Australian Federal Government to:

1. **Establish a vertically integrated climate policy framework\(^2\) and recognise Local Government Contributions\(^3\) in the Australian Nationally Determined Contributions** to ensure current national climate targets are genuinely ambitious.
2. **Establish an effective partnership between local governments and the Federal Government** that will deliver an Accord that defines common objectives to strengthen climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience between the three tiers of government\(^4\).
3. **Allocate significant funding** to deliver on the Accord based on the real resilience costs of climate change and what is required for local governments to protect their communities and build back better.

This document provides background information, context and methodology behind the Better Future for Local Climate Action "Ask" of the Federal Government. This background paper explains how and why we got to these final three points; who was involved in developing and crafting the message (and why); why it is important to have a unified and aligned message from the key local government stakeholders, and by extension the local government sector as a whole.

**Background**

Local governments have been leading on climate action in Australia for decades. More than 200 local governments, representing over 19 million Australians and accounting for 75% of Australia's population, are already taking action on climate change.

\(^1\) 204 local governments, representing over 19.4 million Australians or 76% of Australia's population, are already taking action on climate change and are a member of participant in at least of ICLEI Oceania, Cities Power Partnership, Climate Emergency Australia and/or the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy

\(^2\) Vertical Integration: the act of aligning and coordinating climate policies, plans and implementation across different levels of government, leveraging the potential of each respective level through collective efforts and promoting top-down and bottom-up information exchange. See C40 Climate Action: Planning Programme Vertical Integration Guide.

\(^3\) The Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy Multilevel Climate Action Playbook (2021) sets out recommendations on the integration of Local and Regional Contributions (LRCs) into NDCs.

\(^4\) This partnership and Accord model is inspired by the Victorian Local Climate Action Partnership: strengthening local-state government collaboration on climate action. July 2016.
Over 110 of Australia’s 537 councils have declared a climate emergency, joining 1,800 others around the world. Thirty-five Australian councils are signatories of the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, working alongside a global network of 11,700 local governments working to reduce emissions at the local level. Meanwhile 174 councils are members of Cities Power Partnership (CPP), the Climate Council local government program bringing councils and communities together to build and accelerate climate action.

Over 76% of the Australian population resides in a council area that is a member of the Cities Power Partnership, declared a Climate Emergency and/or is a member of ICLEI Oceania or the Global Covenant of Mayors. With opportunities to work together, across sectors and with the federal government, we know councils can put Australia on a path to prosperous, zero emissions and climate-resilient futures.

Australian local governments have been setting ambitious emissions reduction targets, delivering energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. At the Better Futures Forum in August 2021 and a special “Lift Your Gaze” event in late 2020, the biggest challenge to putting on an event highlighting council climate action is not finding relevant, interesting and valuable projects and ambitions, but determining what to leave out.

The collective effort of local government leaders in 2021 made clear that local governments play a vital role in meeting national emissions targets. However local governments are limited in their ability to accelerate climate action due to common factors, including but not limited to:

- A lack of recognition of the role of local government in meeting national emissions targets;
- A lack of a strong interim national target to make change;
- Limitations of federal and state policies, legislation and regulations including barriers to innovation and collaboration;
- Inadequate funding to implement plans and undertake collaborative regional projects at scale;
- Limited access to expertise; and
- How local governments coordinate and work together to accelerate action.

Ahead of COP27 in November 2022, the key local government, climate and city networks are aiming to achieve recognition from federal representatives of the important role of local government in driving climate action on the ground. This includes acknowledgement of the potential to enhance the ambition of Australia’s Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) and Long Term Strategy (LTS) through partnerships between federal and local government.

A key to this process has been to ensure a collective and aligned voice on behalf of the local government sector. This has been completed via the development of a scoping study to identify and articulate a consistent and clear “ask” of the federal government to accelerate ambitious national climate action in the lead up to COP27 that the majority of Australia’s local government sector can get behind. This shared “ask” will be central to ensure the local
government sector can lead on impactful joint advocacy efforts within the sector and engaging in multi-sectoral advocacy and action dialogues throughout 2022.

**Methodology**

Through the Better Futures Australia (BFA) Local Government Working Group, representatives from each of the key Australian and international city networks were involved in developing a scoping study and a series of “asks” on behalf of the local government sector to the Federal Government. The project working group included:

- **ICLEI Oceania** (Jess Robbins)
- **Climate Emergency Australia** (David Mieklejohn)
- **Cities Power Partnership** (Darcy Pimblett and Portia Odell)
- **Climateworks Centre** (Margot Delafoulhouze)
- **Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy** (Cathy Oke)
- **Climate Action Network Australia** (Lisa Cliff)
- **Ironbark Sustainability** (Alexi Lynch and Jenny Frieden)

The process involved detailed desktop research into the key barriers and opportunities for Australian local governments, drawing largely from the comprehensive work undertaken in the last 18 months including the [Local Government Review 2021 (ICLEI Oceania and Ironbark Sustainability)](https://www.iclei.org); [Tracking Progress: 2020 Snapshot of Council Action on Climate Change (Cities Power Partnership)](https://www.citiespowerpartnership.org.au); [State of Play: Local governments and city networks accelerating climate action in Australia (ICLEI Oceania)](https://www.iclei.org) and more. The project working group had access to the raw data from these projects and developed an initial summary of the key barriers across the multiple surveys and resources.

A series of interviews and workshops were conducted to understand the key areas where the Federal Government could assist in overcoming the key barriers, building on the strengths of local government and working together to accelerate climate action.

Draft reports, with recommendations or “asks” on behalf of the sector were developed and reviewed by the Australian representatives of the ICLEI Regional Executive Committee (RexCom), including:

- Anna Reynolds, Lord Mayor of Hobart
- Amanda Stone, Yarra City Council
- Nuatali Nelmes, Newcastle City Council

This group had critical input to ensure the message was going to strike the right balance from a political perspective, and provide input into how the “asks” would sit within the confines of the existing Federal-Local government relationship.

Through ICLEI Oceania’s MOU with the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), a series of briefings were carried out to ensure alignment with ALGA goals and advocacy. The
“asks” were stress-tested at workshops and briefing throughout April to June 2022 and through the Local Leaders group of the Cities Power Partnership.

Through Better Futures Australia and in particular the Climate Action Network Australia (CANA) Power Through Collaboration conference in June 2022, the broader climate movement was consulted to ensure that local government advocacy was consistent with that of the climate movement. This in particular included input to ensure simple communication and understanding the motivations of the stakeholders, in this case the Federal Government. Advice from CANA members also included the importance of ensuring the local government sector “stay on message”, and remembering that what an individual council or city network says or advocates for can be translated as advocacy on behalf of the whole sector. The final “ask” has therefore been developed in collaboration with all of the key city networks and programs and is tightly focussed on ensuring meaningful and long-term engagement with the Federal Government.

Why These Three Asks?

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<th>1. Establish a vertically integrated climate policy framework and recognise Local Government Contributions in the Australian Nationally Determined Contributions to ensure current national climate targets are genuinely ambitious.</th>
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**2. Establish an effective partnership between local governments and the Federal Government that will deliver an Accord that defines common objectives to strengthen climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience between the three tiers of government.**

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<th>Why?</th>
<th>To facilitate, rebuild and strengthen the climate action partnerships between local governments and the Federal Government. The Accord will define common objectives to strengthen climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience between the three tiers of government.</th>
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<td>More Detail</td>
<td>Federal-Local climate relationships have deteriorated since 2013. This “ask” involves setting up an ongoing partnership so there are clear communication channels and an understanding of priorities and barriers from councils. This will ensure that policies, programs, support, funding to assist local government actually meet local needs and respond to appropriate to barriers - by having key local government stakeholders meeting regularly with Federal counterparts. The language of an “Accord” is deliberate and speaks to a relationship more in depth than a partnership but an agreement that can involve granting recognition or status for parties. See previous Local Government Sustainability Accord between Vic State and LG.</td>
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<td>The intention is to move beyond previous Federal-Local partnerships and communications that defaulted to funding (CCP, CEEP, LGEEP etc). There is a clear role for city networks to be driving this and then to bring in the views and needs of member councils across the spectrum - big, small; rural, regional, metro; throughout all states and territories. Under the high-level “Accord” it is envisaged there would be working groups or sub-committee focused on the key priorities - as determined through the Accord. For example, the establishing of a Climate Action Regulatory Reform Working Group to investigate and remove regulatory, policy and other barriers to climate action for local governments and communities and ensure policy coherence and synchronisation at all levels of Government and with relevant industry stakeholders. Or a local government Local Electric Vehicle Transition Program to support councils to plan for the rapid transition to EVs and development of charging infrastructure and ensure councils can grasp the opportunities presented by the EV revolution and ensure no local communities are left behind.</td>
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### 3. Allocate significant funding to deliver on the Accord based on the real resilience costs of climate change and what is required for local governments to protect their communities and build back better.

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<th>ALGA has called on the Government to contribute at least $200 million per annum over four years in the form of a disaster mitigation fund and this “ask” supports ALGA’s request. Councils simply do not have the funding to respond to climate related disasters.</th>
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<td>While support for the $200m from ALGA stands, this “ask” takes it further and calls for a more strategic and evidence-based approach to the real resilience costs of climate change for local governments. This is essentially the first bit of work here - work with local government adaptation and resilience leaders, experts and academia to determine the real resilience costs of climate change to local councils and communities from current and future fires, floods, heat waves, coastal inundation, extreme weather events and other climate impacts. After this, councils around Australia will have evidence-based research to ensure future funding for adaptation and resilience is enough to cover what is required.</td>
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### Next Steps

The “ask” will be officially launched and presented to local government stakeholders on the first day of the Better Futures Forum in Canberra on Tuesday 6th September 2022 by Nuatali Nelmes, Mayor of Newcastle City Council. Councils are invited to attend this event (and indeed the entire Better Futures Forum) from 4pm-5:15pm, titled Partnering with local government to transition and build climate resilience.

After a short presentation by Nuatali, attendees will move onto a workshop facilitated by represented of ICLEI Oceania, Cities Power Partnership and the Global Covenant of Mayors to discuss “what happens next” and start identifying the details of how vertical integration between the Federal Government and Local Government can be developed in the lead-up to COP.