

# Executive Report



National Consultation on the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy Framework for Local Government Climate Action in Australia.

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## **Contributors to the reports, consultations and outcomes**

ICLEI Oceania: Bernie Cotter, Dr Nooshin Toorabi, Dr Sali Bache, Tim Shue, Sue Oliver, Steve Gawler, Steven Thuinessen. University of Canberra: Prof Barbara Norman, Jason Alexandra, Jo Mummery, David Flannery, Collette Gilmour, Maxine Cooper

## **About Us**

ICLEI—Local governments for sustainability is a global network of more than 1,750 local and regional governments committed to sustainable urban development. Active in 100+ countries, we influence sustainability policy and drive local action for low emissions, nature-based, equitable, resilient and circular development. The ICLEI Oceania Regional Secretariat serves the interests and needs of local governments in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Island Nations. ICLEI Oceania is the GCoM Oceania Regional Office.

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## Project overview

**Project Title:** National Consultation on the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy Framework for Local Government Climate Action in Australia.

ICLEI Oceania received funding from the European Commission (EC) *Strategic Partnerships for the Implementation of the Paris Agreement* (SPIPA) program to develop options for aligning national and state government climate responses to coordinate more closely with the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy (GCoM) framework. The project outputs were:

- To establish an initial policy paper to inform the First National Roundtable.
- To undertake state-by-state consultations to raise awareness of the GCoM and understand the current approaches in each state.
- To research the range of local climate programs available and to identify and document programs and resources which may align with the GCoM framework.
- To undertake a scan of appropriate international tools and resources that might be useful to Australian councils.
- Examine data and measurement challenges.
- Undertake a Second National Roundtable to present findings and seek strategic guidance on the best way forward.
- A Final Report that identifies the process, findings, opportunities and recommendations for future development of GCoM across Australia.

The final outcomes for the project provides recommendations for:

- An overall strategic direction for national delivery
- The provision of direct and technical support based on identified needs
- Capacity building and resourcing for the regional secretariat functional support

The results of the project are detailed in this **Executive Report** which should be read in conjunction with the more detailed **Final Report** and companion **Inventory Report**. Both included relevant **attachments**.

# Background

Australia is a signatory to the Paris Climate Agreement and through its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) has flagged its intention to meet its 2030 target. Various reports and assessments question whether Australia, and more than half of all G20 countries, will meet those targets or whether they are sufficient in any case to keep global temperature increase well below 2°C. At present Australia lacks proactive national policies to mobilise and support sub-national levels of government to take climate action.

Australia's federal system of government means that local governments are under the direct authority of separate state governments and few national climate programs are designed specifically for them. Most state governments, while not signatories to the Paris Agreement, have set ambitious targets either for overall reductions in carbon and/or increases in renewable energy. They provide policy and legislation to help frame programs for reducing carbon, increasing renewables, offsets or adapting to climate challenges, building climate resilience or low carbon economy transition strategies.

Australia's 537 local government authorities span diverse bio-climatic and socio-economic regions ranging from globally connected cities to the rural and remote. Many local governments are formally engaged in climate responses, reducing greenhouse emissions and responding to climate challenges—some for over two decades. The extent of involvement however depends on legislative responsibility, access to support resources, community ambition, capacity and motivation of council staff, the nature of risks and competing local priorities.

The Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy (GCoM) is the pre-eminent international approach to mobilising local action towards a shared vision for a low emission and resilient society. The GCoM is a broad global alliance that enables and supports voluntary action on combating climate change involving over 9,300 cities and local governments, that represent over 800 million people in over 125 countries on six continents. Global membership is growing as more local governments respond to the need for urgent action.

Currently 26 local governments are involved in the Australian chapter of the GCoM, representing approximately 14% of the population. ICLEI Oceania is the Secretariat to this network, but this role is currently unfunded.

A strong case exists to scale up GCoM in Australia to support the diverse range of local government climate programs and to act in a support role (together with local government networks and NGOs) to unify these approaches and report on that effort across all levels of government and also to the international community. Only through effective partnership approaches will Australia achieve the momentum required to meet our NDC and hopefully to exceed its Paris targets.



# Project Outcomes

The aim of the project was to determine a way forward for the continuation of the GCoM framework in Australia. The results and findings to date have been very informative and the combination of research and formal discussions with possible partners and stakeholders has built a case for continuation and improvement of the GCoM in Australia.

The analysis identifies many positive benefits for local government participation and the need to continue to build the necessary support and wider program opportunities. Therefore the development of strategic directions and a complementary work program needs to be developed to build this capacity over the short, medium and longer terms.

The project found state and local governments are active in climate adaptation and mitigation actions through a diverse array of initiatives. These initiatives focus on reducing emissions, supporting renewables, increasing sequestration, and mobilising adaptation responses to the range of risk factors to the environment, physical infrastructure and community wellbeing.

Local governments' climate and cleaner energy actions are ambitious and gaining momentum with the level and nature of involvement dependent on local context, resources and capacity, community and political motivations, awareness of risks and competing local priorities. The project identified strong support for local solutions to climate challenges that also provide secure, sustainable and affordable energy; reduce energy dependence; build climate-resilient communities that enhance people's quality of life; stimulate investment and innovation; boost local economies and create jobs; and reinforce engagement and cooperation.

The project developed an inventory of state-based climate programs and initiatives with an additional scan of international resources, programs and tools that may be offered to support local government participation in the GCoM. It also provides a summary of data and measurement issues critical to achieving local climate outcomes and tracking progress toward targets.

The consultation and inventory scan documented more than 29 programs delivered by state governments, local government associations and NGOs that provide partial alignment with the GCoM Common Reporting Framework (CRF) commitments and therefore these already provide support to local governments in their climate responses.

There are also numerous programs that local councils can draw upon that are designed for community or business sector access which provide resources for local climate responses. These are usually identified as discrete actions for energy conservation, carbon offsets or transition to renewables.

Interest and involvement in the use of the GCoM framework in Australia appears to be increasing, with the consultations identifying interest in developing more cohesive and better supported networks working regionally, within states and nationally.

Local governments will likely assess the value of GCoM reporting in line with local priorities and state-based expectations. To add value the GCoM will need to be appropriate for the continent's bio-geographically and socio-economically diverse regions, (e.g. inland country towns, coastal centres, capital cities, remote tropical settlements). Therefore approaches to accelerate the wider adoption of the GCoM model may need to be responsive to this context and diversity.

Despite numerous and significant local and state actions, there is no national policy framework for coordination, peer learning or reporting for both mitigation and adaptation or climate resilience activities, outside that offered by the GCoM.

Subnational or sectoral initiatives that support access to resources, peer learning and limited reporting do occur but are patchy, parochial and funding dependent.

The consultation did not find any current Federal Government initiatives that meaningfully support local governments to contribute directly to Australia's NDC or Paris Agreement targets in a structured, measurable and financially supported way.

The nascent GCoM model in Australia has demonstrated its capacity to span diverse national circumstances and challenges, and should now be scaled up.

## Consultation and state inventory findings

At least 77 individuals were consulted about the SPIPA project through 33 formal meetings. In general, departmental staff represented their relevant Premier or Minister. Over 60 invited stakeholders provided input at the first and second National Roundtables. Meetings with these key stakeholders found:

- Numerous programs, initiatives and approaches that could be more closely aligned with the GCoM framework.
- An appetite at state, regional and local levels for improved reporting standards and methods.
- An opportunity for greater recognition of Australian councils' contributions nationally and internationally.
- Perceived benefit in considering ways to aggregate the impacts of local action to help meet Australia's targets.
- A need for the GCoM to be more visible and more widely promoted in Australia.

To accelerate the Australia-wide adoption of the GCoM model, its delivery must be carefully tailored to work effectively within the Australian policy context and federal governance system.

Local action may be best supported at the state level with support by state government and/or state based local government associations. In some states the GCoM model should build on existing programs rather than introduce a new and possibly competing set of requirements. It should identify ways of assisting councils already involved or considering engagement in GCoM to do so supported by those existing or future programs.

Creating greater alignment with existing programs would benefit participating local governments, reduce confusion and avoid additional reporting and would also have the potential to aggregate support/resources from all sources to provide a common message on local government climate ambition.

The state policy context for local government mitigation (low carbon) action is very strong. Community demand for a low emissions future is being turned into innovative responses at the local level.

Having a consistent approach to strategically manage, report and implement Adaptation Plans especially at the regional/coastal level would assist building Australian climate resilience while meeting our international obligations.

Stakeholders valued the opportunity of reporting and making comparisons. Most accepted that consistent inventories, assessments and reporting can add significant value.

Those state governments with clearly defined policies or legislative obligations were most interested in understanding the methodology for measuring community-wide emissions and the requirements for climate risk-reduction assessment.

Keeping track of local responses and measuring that impact remains a challenge given the scale of local activities and the lack of a coordinated national reporting framework.

The general reaction to the consultation was overwhelmingly positive. Almost every stakeholder endorsed the important roles played by local governments in meeting community ambitions and responding to the Paris Agreement.

The development of a “roadmap” of the relevant roles of organisations and programs is critical to create alignment and direction.



## National and state inventory of programs

The research identified at least 29 state government, local government association (LGA) and NGO programs that support local government reporting on adaptation and/or mitigation outcomes. Adaptation initiatives significantly outnumber mitigation initiatives.

Strategic development of the GCoM in Australia needs to be aware of the considerable variation in program priorities between states. Further assessment will be needed to tailor the compliance and reporting requirements of GCoM to accommodate this variation.

The NGO sector is mainly active in assisting local governments to scale up carbon reduction activities, often through community-level action. They are playing important roles in promoting and sharing better practice examples, building staff capacity, behavioural approaches and encouraging political leadership.

Many state programs support structured local government adaptation strategies, identifying risk and hazards and developing adaptation plans, often in regional clusters. This aligns closely with the approach of the GCoM Common Reporting Framework.

Despite the diverse range of state-level initiatives, the research found no comprehensive and integrated programs covering both mitigation and adaptation for municipalities within a single framework, excepting GCoM. (see Inventory Report).

## Scan of international tools and resources

The scan found that there is a wide range of international programs, tools and guides (PTG) which could potentially be useful to Australian local governments and complement, or add value to, existing local resources. These range from comprehensive step-by-step planning guides, to technical tools designed specifically for mitigation or adaptation, to conceptual models and reporting frameworks. They cover all 5 phases of the GCoM - assessment, planning, target setting, implementation, reporting and review.

An Assessment Matrix using 6 high level selection criteria is provided with this report. However it is recommended that further evaluation and field-testing of the most valuable PTG should be undertaken before offering these to local governments. It would then be necessary to establish a support system to provide coordination, research and development, capacity building, to obtain the best results from these resources. (see Final Report).

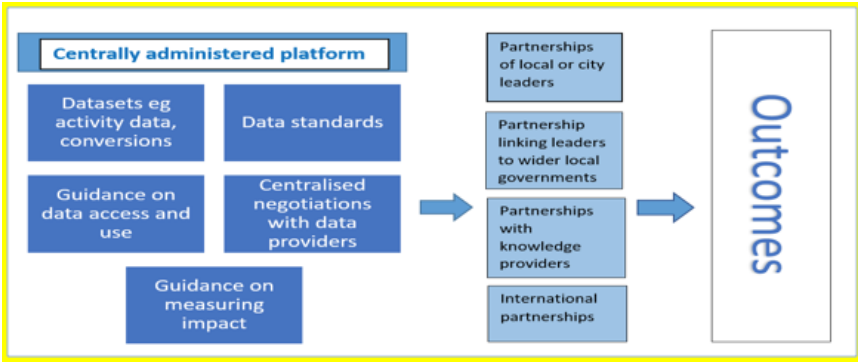
# Data and measurement

Enhancing data and measurement capabilities of local councils was recognised as critical to the GCoM compliance outcomes of greenhouse emission baselines, target setting and tracking and reporting on progress. The consultation and research found support for:

- Promoting the use of the GCoM Common Reporting Framework and specifically the GPC accounting protocol to align local, national and international reporting;
- Enhancing data and measurement capacities and approaches at local and regional scales to report on emissions reduction and adaptation activities;
- Building on existing national initiatives to generate robust insights into measurement standards tailored to Australian local needs;
- Provision of a centrally administered platform on data and measurement (spanning commonly used datasets and data standards, guidance on accessing data and on estimating the impact of measures, and data provider negotiations) which could meet local needs, deliver substantial efficiencies, and support the achievement of subnational and national outcomes.

Recommended approaches to support local councils and to remove barriers to reporting include:

- Establish a GCoM Data and Measurement Technical Working Group to guide work in this area.
- Encourage the adoption of the GPC as the standard for all local government reporting and promote the use of the GCoM unified reporting platform across other programs
- Create and then provide open access to the underlying data sources and conversion methods for each reporting year
- Encourage service providers to local governments to draw this information to maintain accuracy of reports over time.
- Work with Governments and other reporting agencies to align reporting efforts to assist in identifying the local government contribution. (see Final Report).





## National Roundtable outcomes

The two national roundtables were used to present an analysis of the research and identify key issues, interim findings and directions. The wide representation of stakeholders helped to ground-truth and add value to the outcomes and provided essential direction setting advice. Participants included the Ambassadors of the European Union and Denmark and other representatives from the diplomatic services, Federal Government senior staff, state government departmental staff, LGA office holders and staff, mayors and councillors, academics, special interest groups and climate NGOs.

The second National Roundtable Consultation was effective in identifying priority issues and strategic approaches including:

- The establishment of an interim GCoM Advisory Group
- Management arrangements and funding models
- Clarifying the GCoM value propositions
- Establishing regional and national partnerships
- Opportunities to align enhanced data provision and measurement
- Providing and testing useful resources
- Maintaining a strong working relationship with the European Union. (see Roundtable Report).

## Opportunities and maintaining the momentum

Increased membership of the GCoM provides significant opportunities for improved coordination, reporting and impact. There are few formal government program attempts to align current policy settings with the GCoM CRF mode. Most targeted local government programs provided at the sub-national scale however could align with specific elements of the GCoM framework.

Programs supporting local government's climate responses already provided by states, local government associations and NGOs could be developed into a cohesive, harmonised framework based on the established GCoM reporting and compliance framework.

Greater participation in the GCoM by more local councils will depend on their perceptions of value including an assessment of participation and reporting costs, which is why alignment with existing approaches may be the most effective approach.

The GCoM framework approach—voluntary measurement of emissions, adoption of action plans, targets, compliance, and reporting—is broadly consistent with Australia's numerous climate policies and has provided value for the initial 26 local government signatories. However without support and recognition of effort this value could erode.

Standardised reporting remains one of the best potential benefits of being involved in GCoM. However, local governments need to be able to clearly see the value in such reporting in a local context not just as a compliance obligation.

Engagement in the GCoM must be useful and cost effective, must not be partisan or confusing, not overly complex or compliance/reporting heavy. It must clearly demonstrate links to local priorities, such as local employment, liveability and safety while also identifying the critical local role in achieving the Paris climate targets .

Peer networks of local governments are traditionally viewed as effective for sharing knowledge and experience demonstrating concrete solutions are possible, feasible and effective. They are powerful in “ratcheting up” capacity for adoption of transformative solutions and increasing the likelihood that critical lessons are transferred and potential missteps are not repeated.

Supporting these peer and council networks through well designed support, helpdesk, information sharing and advocacy opportunities is essential. The lack of core funding (and other mitigating factors) have delayed further outreach to local government and ad hoc support has been minimal.

National coordination and measurement of local governments contribution to Australia's NDC and SDG has no current Federal Government support despite the Paris Agreement encouraging non-party stakeholders, like local government, to be included and engaged.

Direct and indirect support in the use of the GCoM framework may provide substantive benefits, in terms of scaling up the essential planning, implementation and reporting necessary to *'mobilize stronger and more ambitious climate action'* to meet the Australian NDC and SDG outcomes.

# Conclusions

The consultation found that wider adoption of the GCoM approach within Australia would offer significant opportunities to local government and communities because it provides:

- Internationally tested tools and resources for action planning.
- A recognised framework with consistent and transparent reporting.
- Flexible approaches that suit Australia's jurisdictional and bioregional diversity.
- Opportunities to advocate for a joint governments (COAG) approach to meet the Paris targets.
- A direct measurable contribution to national emissions and therefore to overall global emissions.
- A means for local government to respond to and facilitate discussion with their communities on climate issues and challenges.
- A standard to compile, measure and report on the extent, impact and effectiveness of local governments' contributions and report on these nationally and internationally.
- The potential linking of local governments together in peer networks that learn from each other.

The project found strong support for the wider adoption of the GCoM framework in Australia, however further work is required to clarify and consolidate ways forward. The development of a strategy and work packages will assist the wider benefit and effectiveness of GCoM in Australia.

# Strategic Directions

The proposed GCoM Australia Strategy is structured around the three SPIPA Project Outcomes:

1. Strategic alignment and direction for national delivery of GCoM
2. Provision of direct and technical needs-based support to councils
3. Capacity building and resourcing for GCoM Secretariat function

Outputs and work packages will be developed from this structure along the following lines:

## **1. Strategic alignment and direction for national delivery of GCoM**

- continue to develop broad based partnerships and strategic approaches with federal and state governments and civil society
- map and align relevant programs to assist local governments to understand the range of offerings
- undertake advocacy to progress high level understanding and support for the GCoM to complement local climate action;
- identify funding for regional and national coordination, support for participants and peer-to-peer networks; and
- establish formal agreements with peak local government associations and NGO partners.

## **2. Provision of direct and technical needs-based support to councils**

- further develop local government familiarisation and capability building around the GCoM reporting framework;
- undertake refinement of selected international tools and resources for the Australian context;
- improve data access and local platforms for data sharing, measurement and reporting using the GCoM Common Reporting Framework (CRF);
- provide analysis, documentation and promotion of case studies that motivate successful adoption of better practice models at local and regional scales; and
- seek funding for R&D programs focused on accelerating adoption, policy and financing innovations.

## **3. Capacity building and resourcing for GCoM Secretariat function**

- develop and regularly review a GCoM Australia Strategic Plan to guide focus, delivery, resourcing;
- develop a comprehensive 3-year work plan; and
- identify resourcing needs and develop capacity building plan for Secretariat.



The GCoM Secretariat would undertake both a Strategic and an Operational role.

Regional Secretariat Strategic role:

- Coordination of national approach for GCoM in Australia
- Establish the Regional and National decision making forums in Oceania
- Ensure connections to GCoM Board and participate in regional coherence approaches
- Undertake a key Advocacy role and way to effectively deliver this
- Continually assess fundraising and resourcing plans
- Establish the country appropriate data management protocols/standards

Coordinate annual implementation plans to:

- Undertake city outreach & engagement responsibilities
- Provide effective and timely helpdesk support
- Arrange technical support for compliance and reporting
- Contribute to continual Verification, Monitoring & Evaluation tasks
- Complete aggregation of results and progress reporting annually
- Undertake recognition activities and provide evaluative reviews

## Immediate Steps

Considerable momentum and goodwill has been established through the project to date. It is important to continue this momentum through some immediate action while the detailed work plan is developed and funding is secured . These steps are considered to be critical:

- Initiate an interim national GCoM working group.
- Initiate a data/measurement working group and other ad hoc groups as needed.
- Continue the positive discussion regarding stronger alignment with priority state government and other local climate programs.
- Finalise formal arrangements with identified partners.
- Seek immediate funding support for these steps and explore funding options for the Strategic and operational functions of the GCoM Oceania secretariat.

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