



Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc

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Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow

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Submission “Community Net Zero Draft Plan”

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society is a community-based volunteer organisation with over 850 members. The goal of the Society is to promote the conservation of the environment in the Greater Blue Mountains region. As the oldest and largest environmental organisation in the Blue Mountains with substantial expertise in environmental matters, the Society is a highly-respected and influential local organisation.

Thank you for putting together a comprehensive Community Net Zero Draft Plan (CNZP). The Society strongly supports the details of the Draft Plan and commends Council for investing in the resources to prepare the Plan and offering community groups and residents to comment and contribute to the plan.

The Society would like to take the opportunity to give some feedback.

Council's Community Strategic Plan (p.17 of CNZP)

1. LEAD – Lead objective

1.1 All levels of government and the community work together to restore planetary health, achieve a fit for the future City and a more sustainable, successful and resilient Blue Mountains.

The Society strongly supports these actions.

1.3 The Blue Mountains community is informed, engaged and consulted in decision-making and action.

As stated in the Draft Plan, the biggest source of emission in the Blue Mountains Local Government Area (LGA) are residential homes and transport.

The Society believes that, to achieve the Council's goal of becoming a more sustainable council, it is necessary to have an informed community and reduce household emissions. This can be achieved by engaging with residents and offering interactive sustainability workshops and information sessions to

educate the public, keeping residents up to date with individual actions and a “how to” approach to reduce emissions in homes and making homes more sustainable. Workshops could be targeted at different demographics to cater for all ages and interests.

Examples of workshops could include:

- Information on Electric Vehicles (EVs), waste reduction, electrifying homes, health issues with natural gas, sustainability, energy efficiency solutions, available recycling projects, solar batteries and solar panels.

2. PROTECT – Protect objective

2.2 The Blue Mountains community is resilient and prepared for natural disaster.

2.4 First Nations people are respected and supported to connect to and care for Country

Promote Planetary Health Initiatives widely in the Blue Mountains Community and encourage more regular engagements with the larger indigenous community, aiming at more engaging information sharing and awareness of the connection to country for non-indigenous residents.

The development of a booklet available for all residents explaining the connection between nature, biodiversity and human life and how these different lifeforms all depend on each other for a liveable environment.

3. CARE – Care Objective

3.3 The Blue Mountains transitions towards zero waste and carbon neutral living.

Offer more recycling projects such as recycling of old clothes, soft plastics, appliances and making these more readily available, as well as giving more information about these projects to achieve greater recycling outcomes by residents. Many people are unaware of recycling opportunities or going to recycling facilities is too far or inconvenient. Better education and spreading the word about recycling will increase residents to recycle more.

Make information readily available about different local groups who are engaged in sustainability projects.

4. MOVE - Move objective

5.1 The City has an integrated, accessible and sustainable transport network.

Improve bike lanes.

Roll-out of electric buses across the entire transport network.

Hierarchy of emissions reduction actions (p.21 of CNZP)

Avoid (e.g. walking / cycling rather than driving)

- Biking in the BM is not safe, until better biking infrastructure is in place, biking is not a viable option to reduce emission in the BM.

Reduce (e.g. energy-efficiency measures)

- Make more recycling facilities available in the BM area.
- Educate residents on recycling options and ways of reducing waste by regular workshops and information sessions.

Substitute (e.g. solar panels / EVs (Electric Vehicle)

- Put more EV charging stations in different villages to attract visitors to use EVs to travel to the mountains.
- Consider making EVs exempt from parking fees.
- Community solar battery roll-out across the LGA.

Offset (buying credits for carbon abatement elsewhere)

- The Society believes that emission reductions should be done by cleaner forms of energy, waste reduction and better choices. Offsets should never be used for counteracting emissions.

Emission Profile Source by 2021-2022 (p.27 of CNZP)

Electricity: 42 per cent of Blue Mountains Emissions

- Electricity: BMCC could have regular information sessions on solar panels and batteries and better energy solutions available to residents to allow residents to make better choices. The Society suggests these events would be on a regular basis, spread over the different areas of the BM to make these events accessible to all residents.

Gas: 8 per cent of Blue Mountains Emissions

- If gas was banned, the BMCC can reduce their emissions by 8 per cent.
- The Society strongly supports BMCC to “Get off Gas” banning new gas connection for new builds and renovations and council operation including public pools.
- To reach Net Zero as soon as possible, the Society recommends BMCC to prioritise electrifying all homes in the Blue Mountains by banning gas as mentioned above. If gas stays in the mix of an energy source for BM residents, emission reduction will be much harder to achieve. Gas in the home also poses health issues and many residents are unaware of the true emissions caused by gas, believing gas is a cleaner form of energy.

SURVEY (p.33 of CNZP)

The BMCC survey indicates that the key drivers for resident action is working towards a safer climate and a better environment, with the main barrier to achieve these goals being financial limitations and lack of trust and information. Education in energy efficient solutions could remove some of these barriers.

The Society strongly supports the BMCC’s strategy on how to support the whole community to reduce emissions. To achieve the goals of these strategies, they need to be inclusive of all demographics, be widely available and be offered on a regular basis to reach as many residents as possible. Council’s communication channels need to be clear to residents so the public knows where to source important climate-related information and solutions and to find out what is on and where.

CHALLENGES

As stated in the “Challenges” chapter of the CNZP (p. 37), the BMCC faces many difficult challenges. The power to deal with some of these challenges are out of the hands of council; however it seems necessary that council provides as many resources as possible to deal with these situations and pressure other levels of government to achieve better outcomes for the Blue Mountains area. Without putting the necessary time and resources into solving these challenges, the opportunity to find sustainable solutions and better strategies will be delayed at a great cost of the natural environment, biodiversity and the quality of life for the residents. The Society is grateful for an engaged and progressive council on matters of the climate and the environment, however much more needs to be done to quickly reduce emissions and the chance to achieve council’s net zero goals in a reasonable timeframe. An urgency in the increase of uptake of solar, batteries, EVs and electrifying homes is needed and council has the responsibility to act fast to get the right framework for these solutions to be made available to the community.

OPPORTUNITIES

There are many sustainability and environmental focused groups in the Blue Mountains who continue to run events either directly or indirectly focused on moving towards "Community Net Zero". Many of these groups are unfunded and run by volunteers. Whilst the BMCC's Planetary Health Initiative has been very active in running a range of events for people across demographics including a range of age groups, these BMs community groups could achieve more sustainable education programs and approaches if supported by BMCC. Supports could be in the form of a register to enable the coordination of events to complement each other or supports when required eg the provision of venues, public liability insurance, and advertising and communication through BMCC newsletters to increase awareness and participation by BM residents.

Green waste – reducing transport emission by keeping green waste in the Blue Mountains instead of transporting it to other councils. Making the use of pyrolysis to deal with green waste locally.

COMMUNITY NET ZERO PLAN

Many great strategies and projects are on the way, open and clear communication about ongoing actions and follow up on progress needs to be easily accessible to the community, by regular and widespread information tools.

CONCLUSION:

To be effective in achieving emissions reductions, the Society proposes the BMCC:

- Engages with residents and offers regular workshops/information sessions which are widely promoted. These will engage and educate most residents on emission-reduction solutions, sustainability and energy-efficiency options.
- Bans gas for new builds and renovations including businesses and public pools.
- Commits to a full EV fleet by 2027 and to achieving net zero without the use of carbon offsets. This will assist the BMCC's plan for becoming a certified carbon neutral organisation by the end of 2025.
- Electrifies buses in coordination with Transport NSW.
- The BM LGA emission reduction goals are a medium-term target of 45 per cent reduction by 2030, and net zero by 2040 as per the "Cities Race to Zero" initiative targets (pledging to reach net zero by 2040 or sooner). To achieve this, the BMCC and the community will need to act fast and work together. Part of the council's responsibility is to connect individuals with community groups and support these groups to achieve better climate and sustainability outcomes.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this draft Community Net Zero Plan.

Yours sincerely,



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