

Blue Mountains City Council and the Ready for Renewables Council Challenge

by Clare Power

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Earlier this year, I wrote to all Blue Mountains City Council (BMCC) councillors regarding the 'Ready for renewables Council Challenge' asking Council to make significant changes in their use of gas. BMCC provided quite a detailed response on behalf of the mayor and I have summarised this below for readers of Hut News.

1. Refuse new gas connections - request planning scheme amendments of the State planning minister.

The planning system does not currently restrict the connection of a development to particular utilities. This would be difficult to control through the planning system as there is nothing stopping a property owner connecting to gas in the future. The BASIX SEPP prevails over local controls related to environmental sustainability and energy efficiency. However, options include encouraging applicants to consider the environmental impacts of energy sources, and potentially discourage the use of gas.

2. Phase gas out of Council's buildings.

Council is taking steps to phase out reliance on fossil fuels. For example:

- Council's 2016 Carbon Abatement Action Plan (CAAP) 2016 has seen a 24% reduction in carbon emissions from operations to date.
- The CAAP is soon to be replaced with our pathway to net zero emissions as we have pledged to achieve net zero emissions from operations by the end of 2025.
- Council has developed a set of Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD) Standards for all new Council Buildings and large renovations which includes the following mandatory standards:
 - *4.25 BMCC is moving towards 100% electric buildings and away from the use of natural gas. Gas fired heating and hot water solutions will be considered only where required due to operational constraints.*
 - *4.26 Preference heat pump technology for heating and cooling.*
 - Heat pump technology for heating water is required instead of gas and specifies 'by end of life, all natural gas boilers are to be replaced with heat pumps.'
- Glenbrook, Katoomba and Springwood pools currently have some solar water heating capacity supported by gas boilers. See dot point above.
- Council has secured a retail Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) for renewable energy. Starting in 2023 power will be sourced from Iberdrola's renewable energy projects. This will achieve zero emissions electricity for large sites and streetlights from 2025. In addition to the wind farms, electricity will be sourced from new projects being developed in NSW, including large wind and solar farms and a 50MW battery.
- Council is Investigating purchasing four new electric vehicles for fleet; and
- After joining the Cities Race to Zero Council has resolved to develop a community net zero strategy in 2022/23.

3. Write to the State Energy Minister and urge for the State to plan a way out of gas use as a critical priority.

BMCC declared a climate emergency in 2019 and climate change is an issue we take very seriously. We are member of the Cities Power Partnership run by the Climate Council which strongly advocates the transition away from gas.