

## Zero Net Emissions by 2020: Melbourne City Council's Roadmap to a Climate Neutral City

*What distinguishes the world today from previous epochs is that the hazards which society has to defend itself against are those resulting, not from the thunderbolts of the gods, or the blind chance of an inscrutable nature, but from human decisions.*

McDonnell, 1993, *Risk Management And The Precautionary Principle: Coping With Decisions*<sup>1</sup>

There is now widespread scientific agreement that modern societies are producing more greenhouse gases than the atmosphere can accommodate, resulting in changes in global climate. There is also a growing realisation that uncertainty about the extent and effect of human-induced global climate change is no longer a justification for inaction.

Having completed a science honours degree in climate change, on election to Melbourne City Council in 1999, I felt it was important to catalyse practical and substantial action. While Chairperson of Melbourne City Council's Environment Committee, as part of its membership of ICLEI's Cities for Climate Protection Campaign, Council set targets for 30% reductions in greenhouse gas emissions by 2010, and was on target to achieve them. (This at the same time as the Federal Government maintains that Australia's Kyoto protocol target of an 8% increase is too difficult to achieve!)

Despite having set the most ambitious greenhouse gas reduction targets of any local government in Australia, to its credit, Melbourne City Council decided to achieve more and to look beyond its own boundaries to effect change. With the support of Melbourne City Council, I presented a proposal for a Zero Net Emissions Strategy to the APEC Sustainable Cities Energy Working Group in Canberra in 2000, and to a further APEC meeting in Wuhan, China in January 2002 for political endorsement. As far as I am aware, the Zero Net Emissions Strategy was the first, and only, environmental project of its kind endorsed by the group.

Three strategies underpin the action plan to achieve zero net greenhouse gas emissions by 2020:

1. Leading edge design, by using the natural cycle of rebuilding and refurbishing to achieve a 50% reduction in energy use by commercial and residential building stock.
2. Greening the power supply, by stimulating demand for renewable energy and energy-efficient power, such as combined cycle coal gasification and fuel cells, as well as encouraging cogeneration and embedded energy supply, particularly in industrial applications. The aim is to increase the use of renewable energy to 45% of projected demand by 2020 and achieve a 50% reduction in emissions from non-renewable resources.
3. Carbon sequestration, by investment in carbon sequestration to offset remaining emissions, and by stimulating investment in regions of Victoria that are linked to the City's economic viability, environmental impact and social equity: 50% of the City of Melbourne's corporate emissions are to be offset by sequestration by 2010.

The major initiatives of the strategy include:

- Privately financed world-class green buildings, catalysed by the City of Melbourne from the growing consumer and developer interest in green buildings.
- A centre for Greenhouse Expertise and Technology, to ensure access to leading edge design and innovation.
- Active marketing of a green productivity profile that promotes Melbourne as a location for knowledge based industries with high worker productivity and quality lifestyle based on a commitment to the principles of sustainability.
- A voluntary carbon market, to allow businesses greater flexibility in emissions management.
- The progressive strengthening of regulation on energy performance for buildings.
- A green supply chain with progressively strengthening standards.
- A city led buying consortium stimulating renewable and efficient energy demand.
- A pilot sequestration investment in blue mallee eucalyptus; and,
- Access of businesses to investments in carbon sequestration projects.

Development of the strategy has involved working with the Department of Sustainability and Environment, the Property Council of Australia, the Building Commission, the Australian Greenhouse

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<sup>1</sup> McDonnell, G. 1993, 'Risk Management And The Precautionary Principle: Coping With Decisions' in *Proceedings of the Precautionary Principle Conference*, Sydney: New South Wales Institute Of Environmental Studies.

Office, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Victoria, the Department of Infrastructure, CSIRO and the Docklands Authority. While the cost to the City of implementing the strategy is an estimated \$1.75 million over 5 years, it is clear that the investment in environmental protection is well worth making. Furthermore, as a means of expanding its reach, the strategy will be made available to all Asia-Pacific cities that wish to adopt its principles.

Melbourne City Council's adoption of its Zero Net Emissions by 2020 is a good example of how the Greens' influence on government can make a real difference. By framing debate and demonstrating that environmental progress is achievable, green achievements in councils and governments Australia-wide are playing their part in helping their communities move towards a more sustainable existence. Given the predicted effects of global climate change on the biosphere and the human communities it supports, there is a lot at stake.

Melbourne City Greens Councillor David Risstrom