

9 July Council Meeting

D25/355921 Council Ac

Executive Summary

In 2008, Council set its ambition to be carbon neutral as an organisation by 2012. This was achieved and Council certified as carbon neutral in 2012 by the Federal Government's Climate Active Program (previously NCOS), the third Local Government Area (LGA) in Australia to do so and the second in Victoria.

Under the Climate Active Standard, in order to be certified as carbon neutral organisations must measure their greenhouse gas emissions, reduce these where possible, offset their remaining emissions and prepare a publicly available report on their emissions trajectory.

Merri-bek City Council first adopted its Carbon Offsets Policy (Policy) in 2015, and this Policy was last updated and endorsed by Council 12 August 2020 (Attachment 2). The Policy is supported by Merri-bek Zero Carbon – 2040 Framework, Climate Emergency Action Plan 2020-21 – 2024-25 and the current draft Climate Emergency Action Plan 2025-26 – 2030-31.

Council has adopted an ambitious corporate carbon target, of 80-100 per cent reduction by 2030, against a 2011-12 baseline. This excludes offsets. Through a range of initiatives, including purchasing all its electricity from clean renewable wind energy, upgrading its fleet to electric vehicles, electrification of heating, street lighting upgrades and energy efficiency upgrades (a Council program operating since 2011), Council has reduced its operational emissions by 63 per cent since the 2011/12 FY.

The Policy outlines Council's approach to, and criteria for, the purchase of carbon offsets.

The process of purchasing is therefore guided by the Policy using:

- 1) mandatory criteria (offsets from Standards approved by Climate Active (e.g., Gold Standard, Australian Carbon Credit Units, Verified Carbon Standard); and*
- 2) desirable criteria (co-benefits including location, reliability, affordability.*

Indicative of the strong interest in local and affordable offsets, the Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (NAGA) is currently leading a project to explore whether a consortium of councils could develop a local carbon offsets project. Merri-bek will continue to monitor progress, however any outcome from this work will likely be several years away.

During FY 2025-26 council officers will explore alternatives to Climate Active certification, developing reporting tools and templates, and building consensus among interested Victorian councils.

Resolution

Cr Bolton moved, Cr Miles seconded -

That Council:

- 1. Acknowledges that Council has achieved significant reductions to its direct emissions over many years through investment in renewable energy, energy efficiency, fleet electrification and other measures, and that initiatives to reduce Council's remaining emissions while in train are more difficult and expensive than those already delivered.**

2. **Commits to ongoing direct action to reduce Merri-bek Council's operational emissions to zero, as outlined in the Merri-bek Zero Carbon – 2040 Framework corporate target of 80-100% reduction by 2030.**
3. **Commits to releasing a public statement indicating that Merri-bek City Council is determined to reach its target of carbon neutrality, with transparency in the way we work towards it.**
4. **Pauses its Carbon Offsets Purchase Policy for a period of up to 12 months, and diverts the budget allocation for carbon offsets to develop options for verified local offsets for Council's residual emissions (including working with neighbouring councils and the Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action where appropriate).**
5. **Notes that to obtain Climate Active certification in future would currently require that Council "catch up" 2025-26 offsets.**
6. **Continues to monitor developments with carbon offsets and receives a future report which outlines a timeline and investment for options for council to reach zero emissions over time, prioritising direct reductions.**

7.47 pm Cr Miles left the meeting during debate.

7.47 pm Cr Miles returned to the meeting during debate.

Cr Pulford called for a division.

For	Against
Cr Bolton	Cr Pulford
Cr Davidson	Cr Svensson
Cr Miles	Cr Iwasaki
Cr Politis	Cr Abboud
Cr Theodosius	Cr Irvin
Total For (5)	Total Against (5)

Carried on the casting vote of Mayor