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To whom it may concern,

MERRI-BEK CITY COUNCIL SUBMISSION TO THE NATIONAL ADAPTATION PLAN ISSUES PAPER

Merri-bek City Council (Council) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the National Adaptation Plan Issues Paper.

Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2028, requiring urgent action by all levels of government. Council is proud of its record in developing and delivering innovative climate initiatives that help lead the way for the local government sector across Australia. Council has also committed to collaborate with others to investigate innovations to create a safe climate for all.

Our Zero Carbon Merri-bek 2040 Framework sets out Council's vision for a zero carbon future by 2040 and our Climate Risk Strategy describes how Council will proactively plan for and respond to the inevitable impacts of climate change. The Australian National Climate Risk Assessment Issues Paper, released in March 2024, provides an overview of key climate-related challenges facing the nation. It highlights the increasing frequency and severity of climate-related events such as heatwaves, bushfires, floods, and droughts, and their significant impacts on communities, ecosystems, infrastructure, and the economy. The paper emphasises the urgent need for comprehensive risk assessment and adaptation strategies to address these challenges effectively. Key issues identified include:

- Climate Hazards and Vulnerabilities
- Impacts on Communities and Economy
- Infrastructure and Critical Systems
- Ecosystem Resilience
- Policy and Governance Challenges

Our response includes the following recommendations:

- Support Adaptation Funding: Provide financial assistance, grants, and incentives to support local governments, communities, and businesses in implementing climate adaptation measures, including infrastructure upgrades, disaster risk reduction and preparedness, and ecosystem restoration.

- **Address Equity and Social Justice:** Ensure that climate resilience policies and initiatives prioritise equity, social justice, and the needs of vulnerable populations, including First Nations communities, low-income households, and regional areas.
- **Strengthen Climate Resilience Planning:** Develop and implement national-level climate resilience strategies and action plans that integrate risk assessment findings and prioritise adaptation measures across sectors and regions. There should be clear linkages between Federal, State, and Local Government roles and responsibilities in climate resilience planning.
- **Invest in Climate Data and Research:** Increase funding for climate data collection, research, and modelling to improve understanding of climate hazards, vulnerabilities, and impacts, and support evidence-based decision-making.
- **Enhance Regulatory Frameworks:** Review and update regulatory frameworks to integrate climate resilience considerations into planning, development approvals, and infrastructure standards, ensuring that new investments are resilient to future climate risks.
- **Promote Community –based Adaptation Approaches:** Foster community engagement and capacity-building initiatives to raise awareness of climate risks, empower local communities to take action, and facilitate bottom-up approaches to adaptation planning and implementation.
- **Strengthen Collaboration:** Engage in collaboration and knowledge-sharing initiatives to exchange best practices, build capacity, and address transboundary climate risks effectively, especially across the three levels of government.
- **Support Innovation and Technology:** Invest in research, innovation, and technology development to develop climate-resilient solutions, such as advanced early warning systems, sustainable infrastructure designs, and nature-based adaptation strategies.

By implementing these recommendations, the federal government can play a leading role in advancing climate resilience efforts, protecting communities and ecosystems, and building a more sustainable and prosperous future for all Australians.

We congratulate the Australian Government in taking action for an equitable, resilient and zero carbon future. We look forward to working with the Australian Government in the implementation of the National Adaptation Plan.

Should you require further information please contact Victoria Hart, Branch Manager Sustainability and Climate vhart@merri-bek.vic.gov.au.

Your sincerely

Joseph Tabacco
DIRECTOR PLACE AND ENVIRONMENT

12/4/2024

Contents

Merri-bek City Council Submission

The following submission has been prepared by officers and is based on endorsed Council strategy and policy positions.

Alignment with current Merri-bek Council policies

Council is committed to reducing the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change while supporting the Merri-bek community in adapting to its now unavoidable impacts.

Our Zero Carbon Merri-bek 2040 Framework sets out Council's vision for a zero carbon future by 2040. Given that the impacts of climate change are escalating rapidly, in 2021, Council, adopted more ambitious targets to achieve 75% municipal emissions reduction by 2030 (against 2011/12 baseline), net zero by 2035 and drawdown ('negative emissions') by 2040. For Council (corporate/operational) emissions we have a highly ambitious target range of between 80 – 100% reduction by 2030 (precluding offsets, against 2011/12 baseline).

Merri-bek's Climate Risk Strategy describes how Council will proactively plan for and respond to the inevitable impacts of climate change. Our Vision is that, by 2030:

- Council competently, accountably, and responsively manages climate risk, and
- Merri-bek is climate-resilient, leafy, and liveable; with
- A climate-ready and resilient community with no one left behind

Merri-bek's Climate Risk Foundational Action Plan 2023-2025 identifies 36 actions that are foundational to:

- Understand Council and community's current and future climate risks;
- Integrate climate risk management into Council decision-making processes; and
- Identify further actions needed to improve resilience.

Foundations for a National Adaptation Plan

What do you think a well-adapted and resilient Australia looks like? Does the draft vision capture this? Why, why not? Do you agree with the key objectives of the plan? What other suggestions do you have?

The vision lacks acknowledgment of varying vulnerability levels, disproportionately felt by groups like older people, refugees, and migrants. In Merri-bek, 26% of residents surveyed struggled with heat in their homes, with half from multicultural backgrounds. Conversely, only 25% of those with comfortable homes were from multicultural backgrounds. While vulnerability is discussed in the objective, equity and inclusion are not reflected in the draft vision. Merri-bek's 2030 vision in our Climate Risk Strategy states that by 2030 we have "a climate-ready and resilient community with no one left behind".

The National Adaptation Plan vision also does not capture the idea of ensuring that adaptation action leads to a liveable and resilient country. The vision does not point to a positive future goal. Merri-bek's 2030 vision in our Climate Risk Strategy states that by 2030 "Merri-bek is climate-resilient, leafy and liveable".

Regarding objectives, driving private sector investment is crucial, but federal commitment to investing in adaptation and addressing funding gaps is equally vital. Many adaptation actions and activities do not generate revenue or have direct financial returns.[1]

The plan will respond to the priority nationally significant risks identified in the National Climate Risk Assessment. Within those, what areas should be the Commonwealth's priority for this National Adaptation Plan and why?

The priority nationally significant climate risks are important. From a local government perspective, the most relevant are:

- *Risks to health and wellbeing from slow onset and extreme climate impacts*. We welcome the release of the National Health and Climate Strategy last year, and the development of the National Heat Health Action Plan. Together with the National Adaptation Plan, we look forward to further guidance on building community resilience[2]. Extreme heat also has impacts on wellbeing, maternal and infant health, family violence, social isolation. The mental health and wellbeing of communities due to ongoing threats and recurrent disasters are also suffering. Addressing these issues require place-based, systems approaches and coordination among different organisations, including health service providers, public health units, and local councils.
- *Risks to critical infrastructure that impact access to essential services*. Improving the resilience of council infrastructure is objective 2.1 in our Climate Risk Strategy.[3] Merri-bek City Council manages assets worth over $2.4 billion that are used to provide various services and facilities to the community[4]. The cost of retrofitting or rebuilding infrastructure after damage from extreme events will be massive. Our recent building vulnerability assessments[5] have also brought to light that we will need to upgrade ageing buildings to cope with extreme heat and flash flooding, to avoid impacts on both service provision and access to key facilities. Assets such as roads and drainage are also expected to be impacted by climate risks. A study carried out by NC Economics[6] estimated that average annual damages to infrastructure in Merri-bek City Council are expected to double by 2050 and triple by 2100. Insurance costs will also continue to increase as climate change is being factored into premiums and insurers are limiting their coverage of significant risks. In many cases insurance for infrastructure and properties may be unavailable entirely, as risks to properties are deemed too high[7]. Other infrastructure such as transportation, energy, and telecommunications will need to withstand extreme events to continue to enable services, including services that are provided by local councils. Storms in February this year caused massive power outages in Victoria and impacted on transportation and telecommunications. Timely and effective responses to emergencies rely on resilient infrastructure.
- *Risks to communities from legacy and future planning and decision-making that increases the vulnerability of settlements*. Cities globally are seeing large population increases, with Australia being no exception. Melbourne, for example is expected to see a population to between 6.5

[1] UNEP Adaptation Gap Report 2023. https://www.unep.org/resources/adaptation-gap-report-2023
[2] Australian Government, State of Australian Cities, 2013.
[3] Merri-bek Climate Risk Strategy 2022-2030.
[4] Merri-bek City Council. Ten-year Asset Plan 2022- 2032.
[5] A full copy of the report Climate Vulnerability Assessment 2023 conducted by Merri-bek City Council with FG Advisory can be provided upon request. The summary recommendations are included as Appendix 1.
[6] Adaptive Community Assets. 2023. NCEconomics.
[7] Uninsurable Nation: Australia's most climate-vulnerable places. 2022. Climate Council.

and 9.9 million by 2071[8]. Increasing density in urban areas may worsen the impacts of the urban heat island effect and flash flooding. Future population growth means we will need to balance meeting housing needs through new development and faster approvals with ensuring good environmentally sustainable development (ESD) outcomes that safeguard people's health and wellbeing.

- *Risks to water security that underpin community resilience, natural environments, water-dependant industries, and cultural heritage*. Merri-bek is a city bounded by water and has the goal to transition to a water sensitive city, as set out in our Integrated Water Management Strategy 2040. Water is an important resource and has great cultural significance to First Nations peoples[9,10].
- *Risk to adaptation from maladaptation and inaction from governance structures not fit to address changing climate risks*. There should be clarity on the roles, responsibilities, and accountability of each level of government and across agencies, not only in planning adaptation, but in funding, implementing, and reporting on action plans and their outcomes.
- *Risks to domestic disaster response and recovery assistance from the competing needs*. As climate hazards intensify and become more frequent, we will need to respond to multiple natural hazard events as well as national security contingencies. This will result in concurrency pressures, overwhelming the government's capacity to respond effectively. Government and community resources are strained as we expect the occurrence of extreme events and disasters to increase. We look forward to seeing more funding and action on preparedness and resilience-building measures that are known to be cost-effective[11].

What is working well in adaptation policy governance at the national level? Are there more opportunities for collaboration, or institutional changes that will help build a more adapted Australia?

The process to develop the National Climate Risk Assessment and the National Adaptation Plan are welcomed. The National Adaptation Plan offers opportunities to provide further guidance on the following:

The different roles and responsibilities of different levels of government. While the Council of Australian Governments in 2012[12] described roles and responsibilities at the high level, we support that the development of the National Adaptation Plan will further develop a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities. We are pleased to see that the critical role of local governments in effective engagement with local communities is acknowledged in the issues paper and that place-based, community-led approaches are valued.

As the risks and opportunities of climate change become increasingly clear, it is imperative that all levels of government work well together to accelerate the transition to net zero and to strengthen community resilience. To meet this challenge, the current fragmented approach to policy, funding and resourcing must be addressed. The *Many Hands Makes Light Work* report identifies that a new approach to climate governance is required to empower all spheres of government to fulfil their climate

[8] Australian Bureau of Statistics. November 2023. Population Projections, Australia.
[9] Dja Dja Wurrung Climate Change Strategy 2023 – 2023.
[10] Wurundjeri Water Policy. Nhanbu narrun ba ngargunin twarn Birrarung – Ancient Spirit and Lore of the Yarra.
[11] World Development Report 2014. Disaster Mitigation is Cost Effective.
[12] COAG 2012. Roles and Responsibilities for Climate Change Adaptation in Australia.

ambitions by promoting effective coordination between and across all levels of government.[13] This 'multilevel governance' approach is intended to turbocharge climate action and give those on the frontlines a seat at the decision-making table. It is also designed to stimulate collaboration, engagement and communication between government portfolios and sectors of the economy.

It would be important to articulate how the Federal Government, State and Territory Governments take a leading role in establishing clear policies, and in funding actions, especially when adaptation actions require system-level responses and support for the most vulnerable. In Victoria, adaptation action plans across seven systems and regions were developed but appear to be largely unfunded.

Local councils are key to strengthening climate ambition. In the lead up to COP28, Mayors across the country wrote to the Minister for Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water on strengthening partnerships across all tiers of Government for climate action. Local governments around the nation further have a proven track record of helping their households and businesses reduce their energy costs and slash community scale emissions in a reliable, just, and equitable manner[14]. In the same way, with resourcing support, local governments have the potential to support communities in adapting to the impacts of climate change.

Clarity on public funding sources and funding flows. Significant public funding will likely be required for adaptation measures in key priority areas such as public infrastructure and supporting community health and wellbeing through changes in service provision. There are different examples from other countries on public funding models for adaptation, such as the establishment of a national climate fund, revenue-based funding, establishing benchmarks for public spending in adaptation activities, e.g. as a percentage of municipal budgets, or further guidance on climate budgeting across different levels of government. This should be done in parallel with strategic initiatives to have public-private partnerships in demonstration projects, and de-risking or incentivising private financing in adaptation, where appropriate. Mechanisms for channelling funding to local governments and community-based organisations will help achieve adaptation outcomes in the community, where they are needed.

Clarity on the linkage and role of climate-related financial disclosures in the public sector to actions in the National Adaptation Plan and capability building for local governments. As part of implementing our Climate Risk Strategy, Merri-bek has been including in our 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 Annual Reports climate disclosures based on the recommendations of the Task Force on Climate Related Disclosures. Guidance to local governments as the system moves to the International Sustainability Standards Board S1 and S2 reporting will be important. We understand that the Minister for Finance will lead related work to implement appropriate arrangements for comparable Commonwealth public sector entities and companies to disclose[15]. There is an opportunity to provide guidance on reporting arrangements and build the capability of other levels of government as we all work together toward addressing climate risks and financial sustainability, including in setting up financial systems to capture direct costs and maintenance costs associated with climate change.

[13] Melbourne Centre for Cities, Many Hands Make Light Work, final report, July 2023.

[14] Climate Council (2019) *State of Play Renewable Energy: Leaders and Losers* https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/CC_State-Renewable-Energy-Nov-2019_V5.pdf.

[15] Department of Treasury. 2023. Climate-related financial disclosure: Consultation Paper. https://treasury.gov.au/consultation/c2023-402245.

How should adaptation success be measured?

Merri-bek's Climate Risk Strategy's timeline is from 2022 – 2030[16]. It has a two-year action plan 2023-2025 that aims to set foundational actions that helps build our understanding of climate risks and impacts across the municipality, as well as to trial adaptation initiatives or projects. This the informs the development of a second action plan for 2025-2030. A 'learning by doing' approach is embedded in our strategy and this is facilitated by a monitoring and evaluation framework and related indicators that are mapped to the five goals of our strategy.

The National Adaptation Plan should have clear indicators, baselines, and establish the frequency of collection of indicators and reporting. Measuring adaptation is challenging, because the goalpost is changing as our understanding of climate risks change and as we reach different global warming levels. It will be important to have an evaluation framework that accounts for system changes, accounting for both climate and non-climate drivers such as population growth, housing density in cities, technological advances, and other broad shifts that impact on the identified systems' resilience.

In addition, sharing of stories is equally important— stories of a liveable and resilient future, stories that motivate people and communities to take action and celebrate what's possible.

Do you support the draft principles for prioritising and sequencing adaptation actions over time? Why or why not? Are there any gaps?

While the draft principles for prioritising adaptation actions are welcome, we would like to see the following as principles:

- *are actions that address risks with the largest impacts to the lives, health, and wellbeing of people*. For example, among weather and climate events, extreme heat has the greatest impact on the loss of lives in Australia. Extreme heat also has adverse impacts on people's health, on family violence in the community, and mental wellbeing.
- *are actions that support Traditional Owners to carry out their own adaptation actions*. Traditional Owners, due to historical inequity face greater challenges in adapting to climate change. Actions that support their adaptation and their own decision making should be prioritised; and
- *are nature-based solutions with multiple co-benefits*. Nature-based solutions are gaining attention globally as adaptation solutions that offer multiple benefits to people and the environment. In Merri-bek City Council, important adaptation actions that we are doing include increasing the urban tree canopy, investing in water sensitive urban design projects including wetlands, and native vegetation planting in along our waterways. We are adapting to climate risks by restoring the natural functions the landscape through ecosystem services such as water and temperature regulation. These have additional benefits such as improving people's mental health and wellbeing, improved air and water quality, and carbon sequestration.
- *are actions that consider place-based contexts and that empower local communities*. The COAG 2012 recognises that local governments and private parties may have the local knowledge, expertise and understanding of their risk exposure. In many cases local governments and private parties do not have the resources to adapt. Priority and support, including through information and funding, are needed to enable local place-based actions.

[16] Merri-bek City Council 2022. Climate Risk Strategy and Action Plan. https://conversations.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/climate-risk-strategy.

We also suggest for there to be principles for an exclusion list to avoid maladaptive outcomes, such as:

- *are actions that result in irreversible ecological damage*. Maladaptive projects such as some offset programs, and water engineering including floodplain restoration that result in damage to the environment[17] should be excluded. Where biodiversity and significant vegetation loss is an outcome of any Federal or State Government project (including those delivered by other agencies but funded by the federal purse), the loss of sequestered carbon and its re-sequestration must be assessed and abated. It is also critical that legislation, policies, directives, guidelines and projects delivered by all levels of government do not undermine the efforts to abate climate risk or adapt at the national level. The National Adaptation Plan must compel all levels of government to assess proposed infrastructure projects to determine whether they exacerbate or alleviate existing levels of climate risk, as done through environmental impact assessment processes of internationally funded projects[18]. Any project prioritisation matrix used by government must categorise whether the project exacerbates or abates climate risk.
- *are actions that support inequitable outcomes*, such as flood levees that protect limited private assets while putting at risk other communities and assets.

Systems sections

Infrastructure and built environment system

For local government, the key opportunities to improve the adaptation of new and existing buildings are:

Improving adaptation via state and territory-based Planning Schemes

A national strategy needs to recognise and support the associated state and territory Planning Schemes, and the integral role in implementation that local governments play in improving the resilience of homes and businesses through the planning scheme. Consistency across state and territory borders, as well as strengthening the partnerships between all levels of governments is therefore needed.

An action of the Merri-bek City Council's Zero Carbon Action Plan *is Achieving Zero Carbon within the Planning Scheme*. Through Merri-bek's leadership, 24 Victorian councils (representing 50% of the Victorian population) have collaborated to lodge a joint planning scheme amendment that elevates sustainability requirements for new buildings. The councils are all members of the Council Alliance for a Sustainable Built Environment (CASBE) and the project supported by the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV).

The Elevating ESD Targets Planning Policy Amendment seeks to build on the current Environmentally Sustainable Development (ESD) requirements for new developments and in doing so, better protect the natural environment, reduce resource and energy consumption, and support the health and wellbeing of future occupants. The amendments include detailed, measurable targets that will deliver meaningful outcomes in practice.

[17] Burra Creek Floodplain Restoration Project. Minister's Assessment under Environment Effects Act 1978.
[18] UN Environment Programme. 2020. Environmental and Social Sustainability Framework. Safeguard Standard 2

Support Change at a National level in the planning Scheme as advocated for by the Victorian Greenhouse Alliances and CASBE*, in collaboration with councils across Victoria.*

Planning decisions being made today will be locked in for years to come - more than half of Australia's 2050 building stock will be constructed during the next 30 years.

We need to increase the resilience of the built environment and reduce carbon emissions – and to achieve this through rapid transformational – rather than incremental – change.

There is a disconnect between high level policy positions on tackling climate change, and day-to-day planning decisions. Victoria has a zero emissions targets, many councils have more ambitious targets, but this is not reflected in planning decisions. Despite work by councils to make the planning system a better tool for change, the system is not yet doing enough to help restore a safe climate and create resilient communities.

To enable the delivery of a safe climate and resilient communities the Government must mandate tackling climate change as a priority at all levels of the planning system.

Requests:

- Amend the Planning and Environment Act and the Climate Change Act to explicitly address climate change at all levels of the planning process
- Require every planning scheme amendment at all levels of government and of the planning framework to include an assessment against relevant climate change considerations
- Introduce mandatory minimum climate change standards into the planning scheme
- Adopt science-based targets for high level policy and align the planning system to the most up to date climate science

Targeted energy upgrades programs and subsidies for vulnerable households

Merri-bek welcomes the $1.3 billion Energy Savings Package announced by the Federal Government for energy upgrades for residential and social housing. However, we are concerned that current federal and state programs and funding is not currently reaching those who need the most support and are at most risk.

Since late 2020, Merri-bek has provided a "one-stop-shop" concierge service for low-income households to either install a solar PV system or improve the thermal envelope of their home with insulation and/or draught sealing measures. The success of the program comes from careful, yet deliberate program design which includes:

- A personalised concierge service- provided by Council staff to support the household throughout the various program stages, including eligibility, suitability of program offerings, right through to completion.
- A foundation of trust- that's established by Council with the household from the outset and is based on not only using experienced, vetted service providers, but Council's commitment to serving its community.

- Targeted engagement and promotional activities- including utilising Merri-bek's innovative "Community Connectors" network, translation and interpretative services, to maximise program awareness and uptake.
- Dedicated assistance- in navigating the sometimes-complex process of applying for Federal and State Government rebates and interest-free loans; and
- Financial subsidies- provided by Council (up to $3,000 for solar or $2,000 for thermal) to address the up-front cost challenges.

A multi-level governance approach is needed to implement energy upgrades programs that leverages the respective capabilities and resources of each sphere of government. An approach that addresses the current market failure and key barriers –upfront costs, trusted suppliers, engagement for 'hard to reach' communities, split incentives and ownership types.

Requests:

- Support and fund local actions on energy upgrades programs and subsidies that are proven to work and that address the needs of the most vulnerable in the community
- Develop and support a multi-level governance approach that addresses market failures and key barriers for uptake of energy upgrades

Increasing minimum standards for rental properties

Merri-bek has a high proportion of renters with 34.7% of households living in private rentals. Renters face significant disadvantage in improving the energy performance of their homes due to the split incentive. From Merri-bek's experience, rental properties can only be improved by increasing regulatory requirements.

Requests:

- Implement priority regulatory changes in:
    - Mandatory minimum energy efficiency performance standards for rental properties.
    - Mandatory disclosure of energy performance for all buildings when they are sold and leased.

Supporting the Resilience of Council assets

A resilient built environment and infrastructure system relies upon a network of individual resilient assets, requiring place- and context-dependent approaches to individual buildings or building typologies as well as asset classes. A major barrier to strengthening adaptation in infrastructure is the age of existing infrastructure and the costs for upgrades. Merri-bek and other councils have significant property portfolios comprising aging assets, and often assets which have reached or surpassed their expected end of life.

There should be a Fund that the Australian Government administers to allow local governments and state agencies to proactively upgrade and improve the resilience of infrastructure, rather than just after a disaster. Where assets are impacted by disasters,

insurance payouts should account for "building back better" instead of like-for-like replacements that are untenable. Councils should also be supported with resources to effectively assess and determine appropriate adaptation actions and the cost-effectiveness of such actions, to understand the extent of refits or redevelopments required and plan appropriately in budgets and asset planning.

Merri-bek conducted a Building Vulnerability Assessment in 2023 to better understand what would be needed to improve the resilience of a small sample of libraries, aquatic centres, maternal and child health centres, and municipal offices. The summary of recommendations is included as Appendix 1. While the needed works were not fully costed, the work gave an indication of the magnitude of investments required, including major upgrades, geotechnical investigations, site regrading, upgrades of heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems and replacement of building components.

As Merri-bek is currently investigating options to deliver similar built solutions across its building portfolio we need guidance and support in identifying adaptation actions that can be rolled out at scale, while balancing that with a place lens on our end to ensure actions are effective.

We also support the recommendations in the Australian Council of Social Services report *Funding and Financing Energy Performance and Climate-resilient Retrofits for Low-income Housing*[19], Federal funding is needed to support energy performance measures in public, community, and social, First Nations housing as well as private rentals and low-income owner occupier homes.

Requests:

- Establish a fund that the Australian Government administers to allow local governments and state agencies to proactively upgrade and improve the resilience of infrastructure
- Fund energy performance measures in public, community, and social, First Nations housing as well as private rentals and low-income owner occupier homes.

Increasing guidance and funding for local government on drainage system infrastructure and water sensitive urban design assets to mitigate the risk of floods through drainage infrastructure and WSUDs[20]

With limited local government funding and resources, guidance and funding are needed to meet water-sensitive city targets and encourage water authorities to upgrade the main drains to help manage flooding.

For example, Metropolitan Melbourne's Floodplain Management Authority should increase funding, resourcing and have a long-term action plan to lead floodplain management across all of metro Melbourne. If local councils are to assess planning permit applications, in their role as a local drainage authority, tailored guidelines may be required for each local catchment. Therefore, Melbourne Water needs to take an active role in capability-building across the local

[19] ACOSS, Funding and Financing Energy Performance and Climate-resilient Retrofits for Low-income Housing, 2024.
[20] Merri-bek City Council. 2023. Submission to Infrastructure Victoria's 'Victoria's 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy'.

government sector and leading the preparation of guidelines for consistent decision-making within its Port Phillip and Western Port areas of responsibility.

Requests:

- Fund upgrades of drainage networks and increased number of water sensitive urban design assets
- Provide guidance and capability building across local governments on consistent decision making related to planning permits and floodplain management

Natural environment system

The following actions can address barries to adaptation in the natural environment system.

Revising ecological vegetation classes

A significant barrier to adaptation in the natural environment system space is the outdated Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVC) categories used by government will no longer be relevant in 2050. The government must review the EVCs with the view of educating the public about the reasons why they need to be reviewed and recommendations for alternative ecological communities to replace existing ones that will not be able to adapt. In addition to this, it would facilitate adaptation if landscapes and regions across the country were classified in a similar way to those employed by the USDA (i.e. USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map[21]).

Request:

- Update the EVCs for future planning and decision making

Centralising data acquisition and provision, national indicators, and baselines for environmental monitoring

Another barrier to adaptation is the absence of a common national indicator framework and tracking against established baselines. Adaptation in the natural environment systems can be measured and evaluated using data acquired from thermal and satellite imagery, tree canopy cover mapping, remote sensing, and other GIS processes. These data sets are currently acquired by each responsible authority at different intervals. Thermal and satellite imagery, tree canopy cover mapping, and remote sensing data must be provided by the Federal Government to all levels of government and responsible authorities in future on a regular basis. This process would significantly improve equity of access to information for relevant authorities responsible for managing natural environmental systems and processes and facilitate better tracking of adaptation progress at the national level.

Request

- Establish national indicators and baselines for environmental monitoring

[21] 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map | USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map

- Establish a centralised data acquisition and provision service for free access by different stakeholders

Supporting and funding action to mitigate the Urban Heat Island Effect (UHIE), including in Federal and State-funded infrastructure investments and Federal and State-owned open spaces[22]

The State Government can contribute to the reduction of the UHIE through nature-based solutions.

Request:

- Lead coordinated landscape-level approaches to urban greening and green infrastructure
- Lead and funding pilots and incentives for green infrastructure such as green walls and green roofs in private development and public infrastructure; and
- Fund projects to establish urban forests in State and Federal-owned open spaces such as roadside reserves.

Undergrounding of power lines[23]

Vegetation clearance requirements around powerlines also impact urban forest outcomes, that are critical in helping to regulate extreme heat. This is compounded by old electrical infrastructure (uninsulated low voltage service line) in Merri-bek needing greater clearance. A review of the Victorian Electric Line Clearance Regulations (2020), could force distribution businesses to replace old electrical infrastructure and reduce electric line clearance requirements in Victoria, allowing councils to achieve better urban forest tree canopy outcomes.

Request:

- Develop a program and funding to underground power lines to enable increased tree canopy coverage in metropolitan areas

Health and social support system

For local government, key opportunities to support the adaptation and resilience in the community are:

Establishing standards for service provision and support to clients during extreme heat and other extreme events

As part of delivering our Foundational Action Plan, Merri-bek City Council assessed the impacts of extreme heat across a range of community services that we either directly deliver or support the delivery of. We focused on services for vulnerable groups, including:

- Maternal and child health (MCH) and immunisation

[22] Merri-bek City Council. 2023. Submission to Infrastructure Victoria's 'Victoria's 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy'.
[23] 2022 Advocacy Priorities (merri-bek.vic.gov.au)

- Kindergartens and play groups
- Family day care
- Youth spaces and programs
- Social support groups, meals service and community transport
- Aged and community services through the Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) and the Home and Community Care (HACC) programme.

We assessed the impacts of extreme heat to the staff, the service delivery, and the clients. Services differ in their delivery context such as where the services are delivered, funding source and regulatory environment. For services that are funded by and accountable to the Federal (e.g. CHSP, HACC) and State Governments (kindergartens, family day care, youth programs, festivals and events), there are opportunities to establish guidelines and common operating procedures for extreme heat, and fund staff training.

Additional support to clients, such as gap sealing or preparatory measures for flood events like raising furniture[24] can potentially be included as standard offerings in the home maintenance program to improve thermal comfort of residents and flood preparedness. Building in flexibility in funding and clarity in the flexible funding contingency pool under the CHSP can enable additional measures during extreme heat events such as increased contact and incidental costs for vulnerable and isolated community members.

Lessons learned from operations during Covid19 can inform flexible service delivery during extreme heat events. The key themes and full list of recommendations from the report *Getting our Community Services Fit for Hotter Times Ahead* is included as Appendix 2.

Additional support would allow us to meet our role to consider climate change in our Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Planning as mandated by legislation in Victoria. Establishing additional funding for a flexible service model for infants and parents in the MCH program during the first 12 month of life, reducing the risks of heat exposure for infants with increasing additional Key Ages and Stages (KAS) home visits can also support better outcomes. A funded and resourced increased capacity to home visit for Key Ages and Stages (KAS) visits could make a significant difference during extreme heat. This also supports MCH screening for safety during extreme heat, as there is a known increase in family violence and sexual violence associated with heatwaves.

State funding for MCH, early years, and youth facilities should also account for the implementation of Environmentally Sustainable Development (ESD) measures that improve thermal comfort of buildings for occupants and to ensure safety during extreme weather events.

Requests:

- Establish standards, guidelines and operating procedures for Federal and State-funded and supported social services for building resilience to extreme heat
- Support flexible funding models for Federal and State-funded and supported social services to allow for innovative and flexible service delivery during extreme events

[24] Home Upgrades for Climate Resilience Guide (cvga.org.au).

- Build capability of social services staff in supporting clients through extreme events (e.g. detecting signs of extreme heat, supporting families experiencing family violence)
- Establish minimum standards, support, and fund environmentally sustainable development (ESD) outcomes in capital works programs funded by the State and Federal Government

Supporting volunteer staff and networks in delivering key health and social services

Social services in Merri-bek are already constrained by increasing demand due to the compounding effect of rising cost of living, housing stress and demand for mental health services. Council convenes service provider network meetings to exchange information and coordinate actions. Through these meetings, we are getting reports from community organisations that people in the community are struggling with increasing homelessness, increasing demand on emergency food relief, and reduced ability to pay for heating and cooling.

The National Adaptation Plan could help by acknowledging the vital role of volunteer staff[25] employed by social services and providing funding support. Anecdotal reports from community organisations through the service networks, report difficulty in recruiting volunteers back to their programs due to the impact of the above-mentioned societal pressures. Services report that coming out of the pandemic, volunteer numbers have not recovered to pre-pandemic levels. Importantly, these volunteer-run programs are reaching people who are more vulnerable, for example programs that deliver transport assistance and food relief programs.

Increased levels of funding for volunteer programs and grassroots community organisations including operational costs that are locally trusted, needs to be prioritised. This funding would help community organisations to adapt service delivery, enable continued program delivery for communities more vulnerable to climate change. Organisations such as neighbourhood houses[26] deliver adult education programs and could work with vulnerable groups to lead community-based adaptation at a local level. During the pandemic Merri-bek neighbourhood houses demonstrated their resilience and adaptability to ensure isolated members of the community could access help and support.

Request:

- Support volunteer programs and grassroots community organisations through funding

Funding community-based and place-based adaptation and resilience projects

The impacts of climate change are experienced by the community at the local level. Funding for community-based adaptation through small and mediums sized grants programs for local community groups can enable and empower local action. Merri-bek is home to many active community groups[27] that support initiatives like urban forestry and indigenous planting, community gardening and local food systems, protection of waterways, and other forms of

[25] Volunteering and Australia's crisis resilience - Volunteering Australia
[26] Reflecting on the role of neighbourhood houses under a changing climate - Jesuit Social Services (jss.org.au)
[27] Community Action - Zero Carbon Merri-bek

climate action. Supporting local adaptation have additional benefits of strengthening social cohesion, supporting mental health by providing avenues for action[28], building skills and capability, and long-term sustainability of initiatives as supported and owned by the community. Community-based programs also offer the opportunity for reach and scale that other centralised adaptation initiatives may not be able to achieve.

Climate adaptation is a shared responsibility among government, private actors, and the community. Funding programs that design for adaptation outcomes and accompanying grant opportunities for community-based adaptation would support and enable the community to take part in climate action.

Request:

- Fund community-based climate change adaptation through small and medium-sized grant programs

Supporting States and Territories in designing and operating monitoring and surveillance systems

There are no centralised sources of data or established common indicators on the health impacts of climate change, such as on heat-related illnesses, mental health, family violence, social isolation, maternal and infant health. In Victoria, deaths due to heatwaves are only recorded for significant events, such as the 2009 and 2014 heatwaves[29]. With limited understanding of health impacts, it will be difficult to assess whether adaptation actions in this system are working. State agencies, working with the public health units, should coordinate monitoring and surveillance systems on the impacts of extreme heat, as they do with communicable and vector-borne diseases. This will help local government support a collective impact approach of working with community organisations and through the services that Councils provide.

Request:

- Establish common indicator frameworks and support and fund data collection on health impacts of climate change

Primary industries and food system

Councils in Victoria have a duty to support public health and wellbeing in the community as a requirement of the Local Government Act of 2020. As part of this, Merri-bek City Council has a Food System Strategy for 2020 – 2024 and are in the process of engaging for the development of our Food System Strategy for 2024 – 2027. We aim to have a food system that supports a healthy environment, healthy people, and a resilient community.

Current barriers to achieving this include:

[28] Climate Change Anxiety | Research | Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences (unimelb.edu.au)
[29] Research and reports - extreme heat and heatwaves (health.vic.gov.au)

- Lack of reliable and ongoing funding streams and access to suitable infrastructure for community groups, many of which are volunteers, working on food production, delivery, and emergency food aid, including operational costs
- Local food groups and organisations lack capacity and skills to measure their impact and the benefits they bring to the local community which may mean they miss out on greater levels of funding
- Community based food security initiatives and the emergency food relief sector is a diverse but an under-resourced sector which lacks coordinated action at the State and Federal Government levels. Council is a signatory to the Victorian food system and food security consensus statement which calls for a whole of government food system governance approach and a Local Food Investment Fund to grow capacity, improve coordination and drive efficiencies in local food infrastructure.

We are receiving anecdotal reports that emergency food relief services in Merri-bek, such as those supported by Neighbourhood Houses and other community organisations are currently overwhelmed with high demand. The 2024 Summer Survey Report[30] of Sweltering Cities underscore the same points, as they present stories of people choosing between paying for energy or healthy food. Support to local food systems, including urban food production, has consistently come up in our engagements[31, 32] as a way to build food security and climate resilience amid compounded impacts of extreme events, price shocks, and cost of living issues.

Requests:

- Support and fund the development of local food production systems, including through community groups
- Develop guidelines and support community groups in impact measurement
- Step-up support to actions that reduce food insecurity

Defence and national security system, including emergency management

Under the Municipal Emergency Management Plan, Merri-bek City Council has identified floods and storms and heatwaves as being among the highest risks for emergency events. Subplans for both these risks have been assessed and developed taking into consideration the impact of climate change and aging infrastructure.

The Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee (MEMPC) undertakes mitigation and planning to ensure risks are identified and actioned. This is done via the Community Emergency Risk Register which is reviewed over the life of the MEMP. Each agency and organisation have responsibilities in reducing risk and ensuring appropriate responses should an incident occur. Merri-bek City Council also recognises our responsibilities to communicate with the community in building resilience and adaptation to climate change in relation to emergency management through communication and education.

[30] Sweltering Cities. 2024 Summer Survey Report.
[31] Merri-bek City Council. 2022. Climate Risk Strategy Engagement Outcomes Report.
[32] Merri-bek City Council. 2023. Climate Risk Foundational Action Plan Engagement Report.

Supporting preparedness, risk reduction, and community resilience education through grant funding, shared resources and coordination among Councils, State, and Federal levels

Community resilience and education is paramount to strengthen adaptation and preparedness. The community of Merri-bek is diverse, requiring a multidisciplinary approach to educate, inform, and support communities to have practical approaches to adaptation. This engagement can take time and resources and must be designed to meet the needs of different demographics. From an emergency management perspective, policies and planning need to be communicated with the community, businesses, and local organisations in an easily understood manner. Removing the jargon from our policies/plans will make this more user friendly as well as giving the information to communities to do their own planning. Information requires to be clear in how policy and planning can be linked into everyday actions undertaken by the community to build their resilience and adaptation. Majority of local councils' resources for emergency management are used for legislated functions and activities focused on response and recovery. Providing funding for preparedness and risk reduction work, sharing across organisations working in this space, and facilitated collaboration can enable and support preparedness actions.

Requests:

- Providing funding for preparedness and risk reduction work that have high benefit to cost ratios
- Review and improve accessibility of emergency management plans and communications

Common review processes and indicator frameworks

Plans within the emergency management space are reviewed in line with legislative guidelines. These plans take into consideration the changing climate and its impacts on emergencies. From a community perspective, a clear assessment of what the community already knows and if the information is designed to meet diverse needs. Behaviour change is an indication that lessons and capabilities have been embedded in everyday life which could be assessed via further engagement and qualitative data analysis. Established review processes and common indicator frameworks, particularly for preparedness actions, can support Councils in assessing the effectiveness of actions.

Request:

- Establish common review processes and indicator frameworks for assessing effectiveness of risk reduction and preparedness actions
- Support behaviour change models in encouraging community-based emergency preparedness and adaptation

First Nations' values and knowledges system

Merri-bek City Council as outlined in our Statement of Commitment, supports a process towards self-determination and local, regional or national Treaty or Treaties that enshrine the rights of Wurundjeri Woiwurrung people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Australians. We commit to build trust,

collaborate, and support partnerships with the Traditional Owners the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung people and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island organisations, communities and individuals and seek their guidance and respect their leadership towards self-determination. Support and resources for Traditional Owners to carry out their own adaptation actions must be given.

Some examples of our partnerships with First Nations peoples in supporting climate change adaptation outcomes are summarised below.

- Merri-bek City Council implemented the Cooling Communities project with funding support from the Victorian Government. We worked with social housing providers Aboriginal Housing Victoria and Housing Choices to monitor temperatures and install upgrades in 10 homes in Merri-bek. Project participants included persons from First Nations backgrounds, persons experiencing family violence, and newly arrived migrants. One of the lessons learned from the program include the importance of building trust over time. As part of the project, an officer was recruited to liaise and project manage the works in the homes of the participants. Having a dedicated resource to engage with project participants helped to build trust and confidence in the program, as it involved works in people's homes. It was also important that the project included works such as planting trees, insulation, and installing solar that directly benefitted participants and not just temperature measurements and assessments.
- In 2022 Merri-bek City Council resolved to advocate to the State Government, to transfer the title of the Ballerrt Mooroop site in Glenroy to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (the Corporation). Merri-bek City Council is supporting the Ballerrt Mooroop Indigenous Led Plan for Country project, running from 2023 to 2025 in partnership with the Corporation and the University of Melbourne. It is a comprehensive initiative to improve the Ballerrt Mooroop Parklands, deeply engaging with local First Nations communities at every stage. It starts with a thorough site analysis, focusing on cultural heritage, stakeholder involvement, and building trust. This includes on-site activities like walks, team coordination, cultural heritage assessments, urban ecology studies and landscape design, based on the objectives and needs expressed by the Wurundjeri elders and First Nations people living in the Merri-bek community. The site will be designed for climate resilience, with a one-hundred-year timeframe. The brief involves developing landscape architectural approaches, integrating water sensitive urban design, biodiversity, microclimate benefits, and community investment. While the early staged of design for climate resilience and with the leadership and guidance of the Corporation, grant funding for works on the site will be needed to support the objectives of First Nations people.

Request:

- Fund housing and energy-related improvements in Aboriginal-controlled social housing
- Fund climate resilience projects led by First Nations people, including capital works programs

Appendix 1: Summary and recommendations of the project Merri-bek City Council Climate Vulnerability Assessment

Merri-bek City Council Climate Vulnerability Assessment

Merri-bek City Council is committed to ensuring that council facilities, infrastructure and communities are appropriately prepared to respond to and recover from the impacts of climate change.

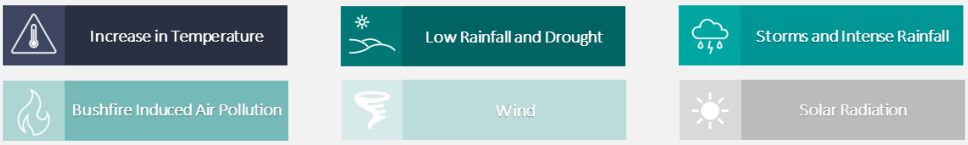
The *Merri-bek City Council Climate Vulnerability Assessment* has been developed to determine the climate vulnerability of several key council facilities. These facilities have been nominated to represent the diversity of council services, community demographics and building typologies across the Merri-bek portfolio.

Based on the assessment outcomes, a list of ***climate adaptation strategies*** have been developed. Implementation of these measures will serve to reduce council vulnerability, improve facility resiliency and support Merri-bek City Council withstand and recover from extreme climate events.

Future Climate Hazards

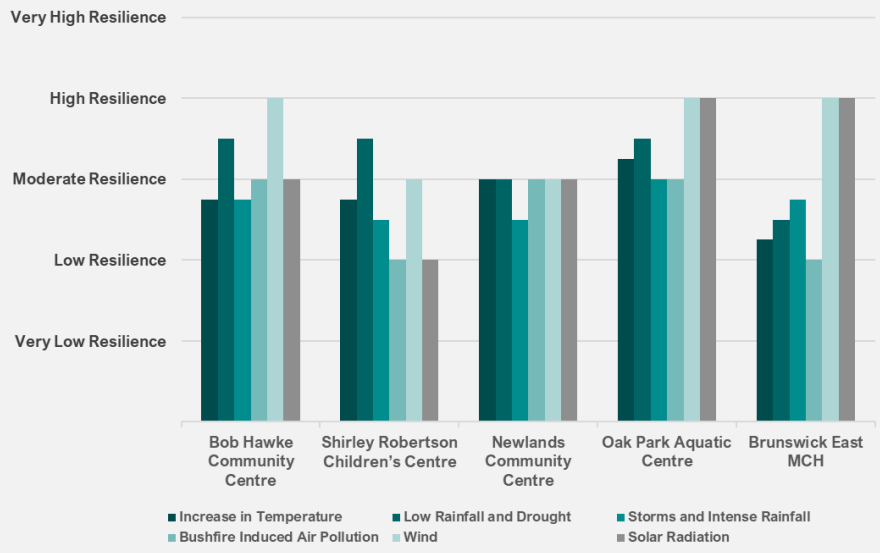
The climate vulnerability assessments and subsequent climate adaptation strategies are based on the *RCP8.5* scenario representing the highest emissions scenario based on current global emissions trajectories.

The following climate hazard categories were assessed using CSIRO/DEECA's *Victorian Climate Projections 2019* and existing climate data provided by Merri-bek City Council.



2030 Council Vulnerability Summary

The vulnerability of the nominated council facilities to 2030 climate hazards is shown below. Further detailed per-facility evaluations have been conducted for both 2030 and 2050 timelines.



Climate Adaptation and Resiliency

Climate Resiliency Principles

The climate adaptation strategies have been developed to enhance Merri-bek City Council ***climate resiliency***, ensuring that council facilities are appropriately prepared to respond and recover from future climate events. Critically, these strategies differ from typical energy and emissions reduction initiatives as they focus on ***climate change adaptation*** rather than ***climate change mitigation***.

Climate Adaptation Recommendations

To address the broad range of building typologies, age, condition and community usage patterns the climate adaptation strategies have been separated into three categories. Provided below is a prioritised list of recommendations for each category. Further detail on each adaptation strategy including a cost-benefit analysis is included in Section 4.

General Portfolio Upgrades

1. **Thermal Envelope Improvements –** Improving the quality of insulation installed in the building envelope, including walls, roof and floor spaces. Thermal envelope upgrades also includes incorporation of thermal mass elements such as concrete or masonry, thermal breaks in the building structure and use of light-coloured roofing.
2. **Passive Design Upgrades –** Incorporating passive design principles to reduce reliance on mechanical heating and cooling systems. This may include natural ventilation, automated shading systems that adjust based on solar angles and natural daylight optimisation to maximise solar penetration and reduce artificial lighting requirements.
3. **Thermal Zoning Upgrades –** Dividing buildings into distinct thermal zones based on occupancy patterns, internal heat loads, and desired temperature ranges, allowing for more precise heating and cooling control. Installing additional insulation and partitioning between thermal zones to minimise heat transfer and maintain temperature differentials.
4. **Airtightness Upgrades –** Installing well-fitted and properly sealed doors and windows significantly reduces the infiltration of dust, smoke and pollutants. By using weatherstripping, sealants, and gaskets, it is possible to create a tight seal, limiting the entry of particulates and pollutants into the building, improving occupant comfort and wellbeing.
5. **Battery Storage –** Implementing battery storage allows surplus electricity produced by onsite solar PV or from the grid to be stored for future use. The stored electrical energy in the batteries can be discharged during grid blackout events to keep critical systems operational for a short period of time.
6. **Storm Water Upgrades –** Installing sustainable drainage systems, such as permeable pavements and rain gardens to capture and treat stormwater on-site, mitigating the impacts of storms and intense rainfall and reducing risk of flooding. Upgrades may include regrading of external areas to limit pooling and flood intrusion into internal areas. Flood-resistant materials, such as barriers, flood vents and elevated electrical systems can also be used to limit damage from local flooding and water ingress.
7. **Rainwater Storage –** Implementing rainwater storage tanks to collect stormwater runoff for reuse reduces demand on drinking water and mains supply water usage. Furthermore, as rainwater storage redirect stormwater that would otherwise enter drainage systems it can minimise the risk of flooding and lower the impact on facility drainage systems.
8. **Outdoor Solar Lighting –** Outdoor solar lighting are reliable, compliant, and cost-effective lighting solutions which provide an alternative to traditional external and perimeter lighting solutions. As they are standalone systems, outdoor solar lights can continue to operate during grid blackout events, providing a highly reliable source of illumination.
9. **LED Lighting and Controls –** Replacing existing fluorescent and halogen lighting with Light Emitting Diodes (LEDs) reduces energy consumption, providing the ability to operate for longer periods on facility backup power sources. Furthermore, due to their increased efficiencies, LED's produce less heat, reducing plant heating loads, facility temperatures and occupant thermal stress during extreme heat waves.
10. **Tap Aerators –** Installing tap aerators is a simple, low cost and complexity method of reducing facility water consumption, which may be of importance during drought and future potable water restrictions.

Climate Adaptation and Resiliency

Climate Ready Planning

1. **Climate Emergency Response Plans –** It is recommended Merri-bek City Council develop comprehensive Climate Emergency Response (CER) plans for use during future climate events. Climate emergency response plans should provide facility staff sufficient guidance and direction in the event of an emergency, and outline actions to be undertaken before, during, and after climate events. Implementation of an effective CER plan will serve to improve facility preparedness, enhance community safety, welfare and aid in recovery efforts.

2. **Climate Ready Asset Management –** Merri-bek City Council should develop a proactive asset management plan to embed climate resiliency into all future asset management and maintenance works. Strategic coordination of asset management, with appropriate consideration of the future climate will minimise council maintenance and capital works expenditure as well as improving facility and community wellbeing.

3. **Climate Ready Procurement and Design Guidelines –** Developing Climate Ready Procurement and Design Guidelines is essential for improving the resilience of council buildings. These guidelines will ensure that climate considerations are integrated into the procurement process and design phase of construction projects. By incorporating climate resilience criteria into procurement decisions and design standards, councils can prioritise sustainable materials, energy-efficient systems, and resilient infrastructure, ultimately creating buildings that are better equipped to withstand climate-related challenges and contribute to a more sustainable future.

4. **Staff and Community Education and Awareness Programs –** Engaging the local community through education and awareness programs plays a vital role in improving building resilience against climate change. By educating staff and community members about the importance of sustainable practices, such as energy conservation and waste reduction, Merri-bek City Council can foster a collective effort towards building a more resilient and climate-friendly environment. This empowers occupants to make informed decisions and actively participate in resilience efforts.

Next Steps

Based on the outcomes of the assessment, the following next steps are recommended:

Portfolio Upgrades Pilot Project

It is recommended that Merri-bek City Council select one building as a test case for further investigation and implementation of the proposed portfolio upgrades. Use of a pilot project allows for a comprehensive evaluation of the adaptation strategy cost-effectiveness, technical feasibility and community impacts prior to widespread rollout. The Brunswick East Maternal & Child Health Centre presents a good candidate for a pilot project as it provides a fair representation of general facility condition, size and typical issues.

Increase Assessment Sample Size

The Climate Vulnerability Assessment was conducted on a small subset of the Merri-bek City Council portfolio. To assist Merri-bek City Council make informed decisions on the prioritisation of climate resiliency upgrades it is recommended to increase the sample size prior to selecting buildings for further development. Enhanced facility data across a wider range of buildings will enable Merri-bek City Council to make informed decisions on high priority buildings, factoring in facility climate vulnerability, condition and community needs.

Climate Resiliency Masterplanning

Given the size of Merri-bek's asset portfolio and available capital, it is recommended to develop a practicable system to prioritise climate resiliency upgrade works. The prioritisation system should consider overall facility vulnerability and may include several additional key elements such as remaining asset life, facility condition, community importance, utilisation, and alignment of the proposed works with broader Merri-bek goals and strategies. Developing a Masterplan for future works that accounts for these factors, resources and opportunities supports a strategic approach to the selection of building upgrades. This Masterplan could be a standalone program of future planned works or integrated within council's boarder strategic master planning aspirations

Appendix 2: Summary of the Recommendations of the Project *Getting our Community Services Fit for Hotter Times Ahead*

Key themes

- **Merri-bek is seeking to build the capability and resilience of its community services to operate in hotter times ahead.**
  - Covid-response has dominated much of Council's attention in the last few years.
  - Three years of cooler seasons have meant issues of extreme heat have not been at the forefront. This coming summer may be hotter, with a 70% chance of El Nino developing (June BOM climate update.)
  - Council's recent Climate Risk Strategy and Heat Risk Emergency Sub-Plan commit to significant action to address heat related risks, including through adaptation of community services.
- **Many Merri-bek residents are at risk during extreme heat.**
  - The Urban Heat Island Effect means many built-up areas in Merri-bek get hotter and that it takes longer to cool down. Merri-bek's rapid population growth and increasing density can exacerbate this.
  - Many residents face additional heat vulnerabilities because they are unable to keep their homes cool; have no private transport; are isolated; have disability or medical conditions; or are at an age (very young or older) of greater risk.
- **Council staff play a vital and trusted role for community during periods of extreme heat.**
  - Council staff are the main touch point for some of Merri-bek's most heat vulnerable or isolated residents.
  - Drivers, personal and home care workers play a community wellbeing role that could be further harnessed for heat safety.
- **Good prep = better response = better recovery**
  - While community service teams have developed practices for managing periods of extreme heat, these are often not well documented. Council staff expressed a strong appetite to articulate clear plans and processes.
  - Identifying heat vulnerabilities and managing heat-related risks have not been embedded in staff training. This is particularly important for those without care sector related qualifications.
- **'Health and safety make us lean out just at the time we need to lean in'**
  - Council's Heat Management Procedure (focuses on OHS for staff during heatwaves) is well understood and appears to be highly influential in shaping current community services responses.
  - A conundrum for Merri-bek is that at the same time vulnerable parts of the community are needing extra support, Council activities are being dialled back.
- **The Covid experience has rewired the way council thinks and works**
  - There is a willingness to be agile, to change approaches, to work together and to redeploy people to where the greatest need is. The heat will mean some staff can't perform their usual role but may be available to provide surge capacity.
- There are **many opportunities to build on current good practices and expand efforts to strengthen heat resilience and safety** including:
  - establishing an intentional approach to identifying, registering, preparing and supporting those with heat vulnerabilities and embedding this as a business-as-usual approach
  - accelerating efforts to build community resilience including through targeted education; community-led multicultural communications; linking the most vulnerable households to initiatives that will enable them to maintain safe temperatures at home; and creating shaded access routes to key council venues
  - expanding the range of Council venues open during the heat
  - developing the heat safety role of Council staff that interface with vulnerable community members
  - offering extended delivery of meals, medicines, emergency supplies and heat health packs
  - cross-use of program resources
  - facilitating transport assistance for people without means get to a cool place
  - providing support for emergency respite accommodation
- Council's facilitation of various service provider networks provides a critical (but currently unrealised) platform for **collaborative planning, joint messaging and integrated community-service responses**.

Recommendations

1. Revise Council's Extreme Heat Action Plan to extend to all areas of community services, including those not directly delivered by Council such as Family Day Care. Build ownership of this plan by unit and program managers and embed processes to ensure visibility among the workforces.
2. Consider development of heat safe flow charts and checklists to ensure heat action plans are well understood and accessible by frontline staff.
3. Bring staff involved in delivering human services and other community-facing programs (libraries, pools etc) together pre-summer to revise plans and ensure consistent and mutually reinforcing approaches.
4. Establish training for community programs staff on heat impacts, risks, heat vulnerabilities, and Council's response. This would be tailored for different parts of the workforce.
5. Prepare for power disruptions by:
   - -exploring options for back-up power at key sites and for food/prepared meals storage (noting contingency planning for vaccine fridges is underway).
   - -planning for outages during hot weather including options to relocate programs (and community members) between Council venues to avoid cancellation of activities.
6. Work with energy providers for advance notifications (where practicable) about power shedding to enable preparation.
7. Develop a process for the community services team to screen dwellings and clients for heat vulnerabilities.
8. Establish a (voluntary) register of households/people known to face heightened heat vulnerabilities across the community services area.
9. Develop checklists to support heat safety for vulnerable residents (WSROC resources could potentially be adapted).
10. Strengthen Merri-bek's suite of culturally and linguistically diverse communication materials about heat risk to include YouTube videos and socials media collateral in community languages.
11. Connect with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to support dissemination of heat safety messages.
12. Incorporate heat safety messaging across community programs and activities.
13. Leverage retrofit and energy hardship and bill support programs to assist those living in heat risky dwellings to maintain safe internal temperatures.
14. Work with the Victorian Government to expedite delivery of their commitments to improving the climate resilience and reducing the urban heat impacts of social housing.
15. Consider individual heat emergency planning with vulnerable households.
16. Continue advocacy for State and Federal governments to mandate minimum energy efficiency performance standards for rental properties by 2025.
17. Expand shaded routes to key Council facilities to support community access on hot days.
18. Recirculate and discuss team heat action plans and flow charts in the lead up to hot days.
19. Display, publish and disseminate community facing information about heat impacts on services (hours of operation, extended availability, additional support available etc).
20. Identify a bank of staff from across Council who are willing and capable of being redeployed to support the heat response, with training as necessary.
21. Plan for offering extended access to key Council venues (MCH, Senior Citizens, Youth spaces) that community already know and go to for those needing refuge from the heat.

22. Work with the Victorian Government to ensure rapid delivery on commitments to provide cool community spaces in public housing.

23. Enhance and broaden the range of responses during extreme heat including through:
    - stepping up contact for vulnerable and isolated community members
    - harnessing and developing the heat safety role of front-line staff who are not trained in care (those delivering meals, drivers, home maintenance staff etc)
    - increasing deliveries of meals, medicines and emergency supplies
    - cross service planning and sharing of resources
    - extending opening hours of additional council venues, that people are already connected with. to provide cool refuge
    - facilitating transport assistance for people without means to get to a cool place
    - providing support for emergency respite accommodation
    - having access to discretionary funds for incidental costs associated with supporting vulnerable community members
    - ensuring measures to keep Council buildings cool are well understood and practised.

24. Use the various service provider networks facilitated by Council, including the network of early years education providers, to drive collaborative planning, joint messaging and integrated responses during periods of extreme heat.