

Local Government Leaders' Climate Change Declaration

TO	Thames-Coromandel District Council
FROM	Sandra Goudie - Mayor
DATE	19 March 2019
SUBJECT	Local Government Leaders' Climate Change Declaration

1 Purpose of report

The purpose of the report is for the Council to consider signing the Local Government Leaders' Climate Change Declaration.

2 Background

In 2017 Local Government New Zealand drafted the Local Government Leaders' Climate Change Declaration and launched its position statement on climate change. At the time approximately 44 mayors had signed the declaration. The latest update as at 8 March 2019 shows that 60 mayors have signed the declaration. The full declaration is in **Attachment A**. The latest media statement from LGNZ is included as **Attachment B** and their 'Climate Change project on a page' is included as **Attachment C**.

The declaration **commits** the Council to the following:

"We have come together, as a group of Mayors and Chairs representing local government from across New Zealand to:

- 1. acknowledge the importance and urgent need to address climate change for the benefit of current and future generations;*
- 2. give our support to the New Zealand Government for developing and implementing, in collaboration with councils, communities and businesses, an ambitious transition plan toward a low carbon and resilient New Zealand;*
- 3. encourage Government to be more ambitious with climate change mitigation measures;*
- 4. outline key commitments our councils will take in responding to the opportunities and risks posed by climate change; and*
- 5. recommend important guiding principles for responding to climate change."*

3 Issue

The Council asked to discuss the signing of the Local Government Leaders' Climate Change Declaration.

4 Discussion

In my view the Declaration is a potentially binding document as it **commits** the Council to developing and implementing 'ambitious plan'. The term 'commit' means 'to pledge to a cause or a course of action'. Council's reputation, and that of individual elected members, is at risk if we do not uphold all the initiatives promoted by future governments. Without a legal opinion there is no way to prove there is no commitment and obtaining a legal opinion is an unnecessary expense in this instance given we are clearly working in accord with the objective of the declaration. A paper by Jack Hodder QC presented at the recent Rural and Provincial Sector meeting in Wellington noted that there has been many climate change litigation cases around the world and recent New Zealand negligent cases (asbestosis and kiwifruit pollen (still underway)) give credence to the possibility of legal challenge.

The initiatives described in the declaration and Local Government have not yet been canvassed and therefore have unknown financial consequences. In fulfilling our fiduciary responsibilities the Council has to follow the decision-making provisions of the Local Government Act 2002. These provisions include:

- Identifying all reasonably practicable options;
- Assessing the advantages and disadvantages of different options;
- Taking into account Maori culture and traditions if it is a significant decision regarding land and water
- Considering the appropriate level of engagement with our communities based on significance of each decision.

While we have not signed the Climate Declaration as a Council, we are already committed to working on many of the initiatives within the Declaration itself. The Council decisions to implement these actions have followed the decision-making provisions of the Local Government Act 2002.

These initiatives include:

- Supporting walking and cycling infrastructure within our communities;
- Supporting a public transport service in Thames;
- Supporting the uptake of electric vehicles through working to develop a network of charging stations across the district;
- Proactively engaging with our coastal communities on shoreline management plans that will identify long term management strategies for each coastal community, and will take into account projected sea level rise scenarios associated with climate change;
- Advocating to central government on leading the response for small coastal communities like ours when it comes to possible threats to infrastructure, private property, the local economy and livelihoods.

5 Suggested resolution(s)

That the Council:

1. Receives the 'Local Government Leaders' Climate Change Declaration' report, dated 19 March 2019.
2. Continues to take action, following robust decision-making processes, in response to climate change for our communities.

References-tabled/Agenda attachments

Attachment A *Local Government Leaders' Climate Change Declaration*

Attachment B *LGNZ press statement*

Attachment C – *LGNZ's Climate change – project on a page*

[Attachment A - updated-8-March-2019 Climate-Change-Declaration](#)

Attachment B**Local Government New Zealand says climate change declaration 'not a binding contract'**

Thursday 21 February 2019 Radio New Zealand

The president of Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) says its climate change declaration is purely aspirational and no one is being pressured into signing up.

Yesterday the Thames-Coromandel Mayor Sandra Goudie told RNZ she did not want to sign the declaration because it was "politically charged".

Fifty-five councils have signed the document which asks councils to promote walking and public transport, improve resource efficiency and healthy homes and supporting renewable energy and electric vehicles.

Dunedin mayor and LGNZ president Dave Cull said the declaration recognised communities and councils had a part to play in mitigating climate change.

He was the first mayor to sign the declaration in 2017 and said he was motivated by the situation in South Dunedin.

"It's not a binding contract; there are no specific goals.

"It's just a recognition that we, the communities, need to be looking to change the way their communities operate and reduce their carbon footprint."

Mr Cull said the declaration had been well-received and he was not pushing anyone into signing up.

"My suspicion is that any pressure to sign comes from communities going to their councils and saying look this is something we would like you to do."

Mr Cull said the idea that it was "politically charged" was a misunderstanding and "no one's putting the hard word on them," he said.

He said apprehension on councils' part on not being able to follow through on the declaration could be why some had not signed it. Resources for smaller councils would also be an issue.

Mr Cull said elected representatives covered a wide-spectrum of views and backgrounds so there was bound to be differences in opinions.

[Attachment C - Climate-Change-project on a page - LGNZ](#)