



Recommendations to accelerate and achieve net zero cities in Australia

Establishing net zero cities is critical to achieving Australia's climate targets. Net zero cities are defined by the mitigation of emissions from the economic, social and environmental systems that make up cities. To achieve this, city sectors – transport, buildings, energy, green infrastructure, food, and waste – must operate on renewable and sustainable resources and energy.

But cities are complex systems with multiple governance structures and unique characteristics that vary from place to place. Getting all Australian cities to net zero can be facilitated by Australian governments adopting a unified vision for a net zero future, supported by investment and sectoral policy reform.

The Climateworks Centre Net Zero Cities project is developing an evidence-based framework for cities that can help Australia achieve its climate targets by leveraging a multi-level governance, cross-sectoral and place-based approach. The project engages three levels of government to investigate policy, finance and governance mechanisms that can decarbonise cities.

The project will benefit all levels of government, creating a more holistic approach to climate action. And ultimately, this project benefits the 70 per cent of Australia's population who live, work and play in metropolitan cities.

Listed below are recommendations for all levels of government, developed through extensive research involving literature analysis and stakeholder engagement. The Net Zero Cities project conducted a comprehensive study of relevant academic literature and case studies to understand global best practices. We drew insights about strategies for Australian cities from local, state and federal government stakeholders, university academics, peak urban bodies, architects, grassroots community groups, urban practitioners and policy experts.

A discussion paper exploring each recommendation will be published later in 2024 as part of the broader Net Zero Cities project.

1. Set a bold and consistent vision for net zero cities

- + Create a vision for resilient and sustainable net zero cities in Australia co-designed by all levels of government, communities, industries and sectors invested in cities.
- + Establish a national definition for net zero cities, covering corporate and community emissions, governance structures, collaboration mechanisms and key emissions targets for energy, transport, buildings, water, food, green infrastructure and waste sectors.
- + Adopt a national target of 10 net zero cities in Australia by 2035.
- + Embed net zero city targets and principles in urban policy and planning at all levels of government.
- + Support cities to set science-based emissions targets aligned with Australia's nationally determined contribution and international commitments. Commit to them through federal, state and local government policies and establish measuring and reporting standards.
- + Commit to yearly action plans and associated funding to implement a national net zero cities strategy across all levels of government.

2. Focus on collaborative governance championed by federal leadership

- + Establish a national net zero cities working group coordinated by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts with representatives from all levels of government, research bodies and the broader community, to coordinate a national net zero cities strategy by the end of 2024.
- + Set up task forces with government and non-government stakeholders to develop, coordinate and implement city-specific net zero action plans, aiming to deliver on the local priorities of those cities.
- + Accelerate policy change for sectors that sit across all levels of government, such as buildings and transport policy (including their respective standards and guidelines).
- + Invest in alliances between local governments to coordinate and drive metropolitan-scale change and to coordinate state and federal action.

3. Prioritise funding for net zero city initiatives

- + Establish a net zero city fund in the 2024/25 federal Budget for nationally relevant projects and initiatives accelerating city decarbonisation. This fund should have an explicit equity provisions to ensure that climate mitigation funding is provided across cities and communities fairly.
- + Create place-based, co-investment opportunities between federal and state governments for local climate initiatives. Local governments should be involved in decision-making and fund dispersal given their strong grassroots connections and role as key delivery partners.
- + Leverage public-private partnerships to expand funding opportunities for decarbonisation.
- + Include emissions reduction criteria for all government funding allocated to city and urban development, ensuring that no funding is allocated to projects likely to slow the transition to net zero.

4.**Embed climate risk evaluation and climate metrics in all government initiatives**

- + Embed net zero requirements in all government projects, budgets, procurements and engagements related to cities.
- + Ensure carbon impacts, risk evaluation and climate metrics are included across all urban policies and are actively considered during decision-making and implementation.
- + Highlight and communicate the co-benefits of net zero initiatives, especially the positive impacts on communities and the environment. Conversely, recognise the risk of inaction in urban planning and policy.

5.**Unlock opportunities for city sectors to decarbonise**

- + Use multiple policy levers on all levels of government, in conjunction with partnerships with the private sector, to incentivise sector-level decarbonisation in energy, buildings, transport, green infrastructure, water, food, and waste.
- + Coordinate regulation, skills, resources and planning for decarbonisation across city sectors.
- + Monitor the progress of each city sector against sector emissions targets, city or precinct decarbonisation targets and Australia's broader climate targets.

6.**Use data and evidence in decision-making**

- + Share data needed to achieve emissions reduction goals between all governments, ensuring local governments have equitable access to data for climate decision-making. Data should be standardised and disaggregated to state/territory/local council level for specific, place-based action.
- + Integrate yearly reporting on urban emissions, climate risk assessments and evaluations of urban climate programs into the State of Australian Cities report.
- + Include an urban-climate lens in emission-specific reporting for the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.

7.**Support the net zero transition through capacity building**

- + Introduce decarbonisation training for all government staff involved in city planning, development and policy-making.
- + Provide federal leadership for governments and industry by implementing net zero-aligned frameworks, tools and processes.
- + Plan for the skills and capacity required in the transition to net zero, and ensure training programs reflect the required skills and knowledge for sector-specific and city-wide transformations.

8. Embed First Nations principles in city decision-making

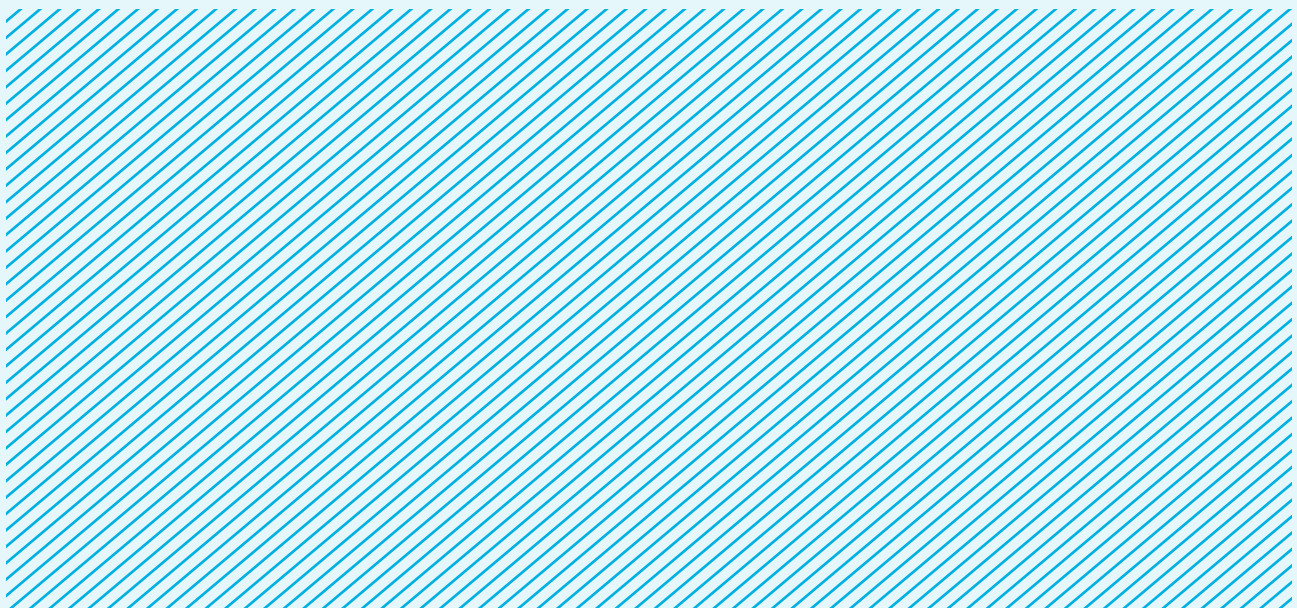
- + Ensure First Nations views and perspectives are actively represented, respected and incorporated in urban policy-making across all levels of government, particularly in net zero city task forces and working groups.
- + Incorporate 'care for Country' principles throughout the lifecycle of city policy, planning and projects.

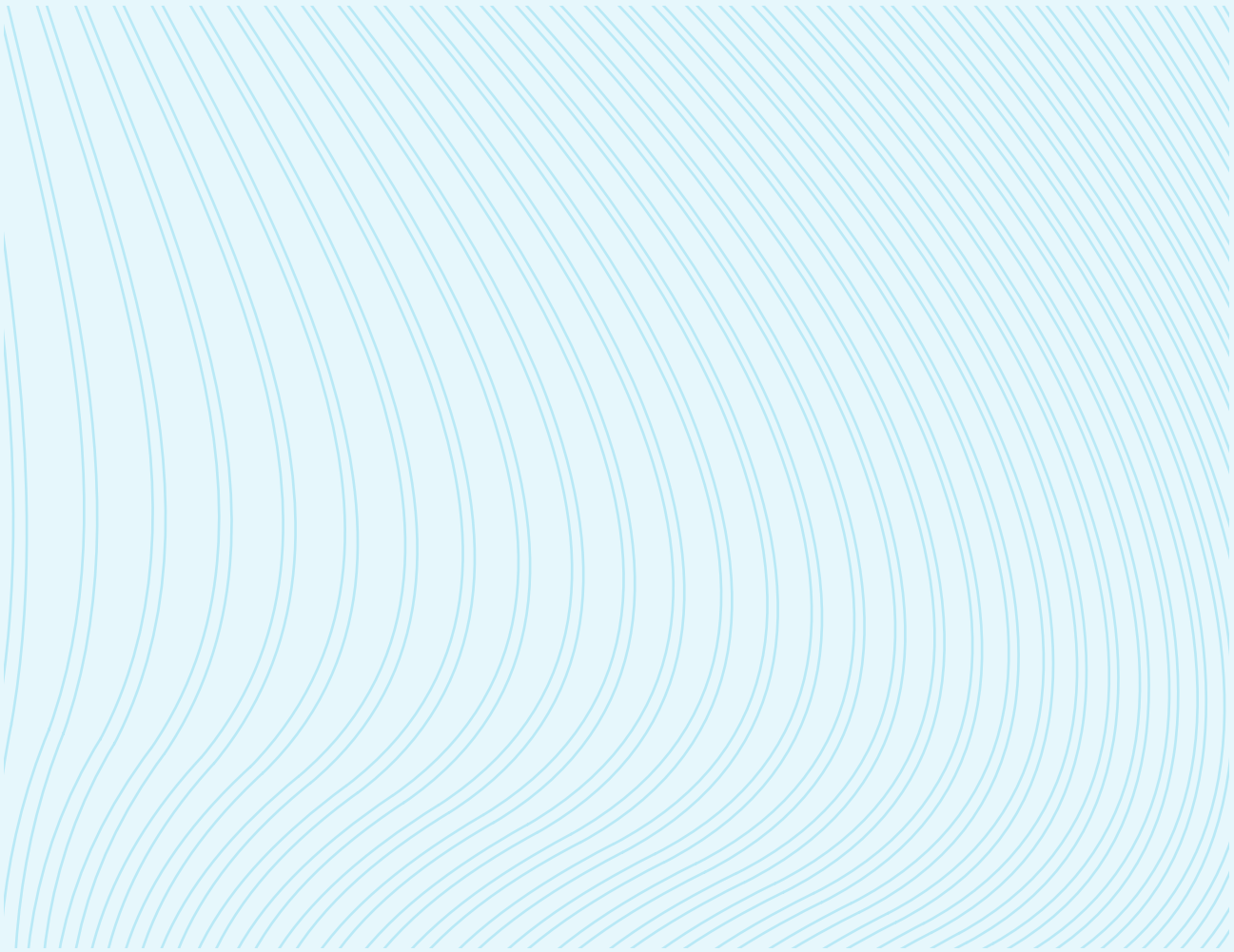
9. Recognise the unique context of cities and communities

- + Develop city and urban strategies that explicitly include decarbonisation initiatives and that are adapted to individual Australian cities' unique built environments and social/ cultural contexts.
- + Ensure future city planning (including infrastructure plans, city boundary modification and land zoning) recognises the impacts of climate change and incorporates 'resilient city' requirements.
- + Consider behavioural and cultural characteristics of Australian cities when pursuing climate and decarbonisation projects.
- + Embed and support communities in net zero city decisions and policy-making through citizen assemblies, grassroots community outreach, ongoing public consultations, and participatory policy reviews. Provide additional support to vulnerable communities so they may more easily participate in these transition conversations.

Next steps

The Climateworks Net Zero Cities project will continue exploring net zero cities in Australia. Future work will provide details on how these recommendations can be actioned to accelerate the transition to net zero cities. This work can be used to inform all levels of government, particularly as momentum gathers around a national approach to urban policy.





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