



09 JAN, 2020

WA taking lead on climate

West Australian, Perth

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State agencies and companies are showing the way forward



PETER LAW

Before Australia's bushfire crisis devastated communities on the east coast and grabbed the world's attention, work was already under way in WA to investigate the implications of climate change here.

The McGowan Government last March launched its Climate Health Inquiry to review the current planning for and response to the health impacts of climate change. Its findings and recommendations will be handed to Health Minister Roger Cook in March, ahead of the release this year of the Government's State Climate

Policy, which will detail how the State will work with business to achieve its "aspirational" target of net zero emissions by 2050.

At the same time as images of the infernos were splashed on the front pages of international newspapers and celebrities donated millions of dollars to the relief effort, 157 written submissions that will inform the inquiry's report were quietly published online.

Far from the blame game played on social media by both sides of the climate change "debate", most of the submissions demonstrate how West Australians are taking

climate action and that responsibility must be shared between political leaders, public servants, the corporate world and individual citizens.

The Department of Fire and Emergency Services will see — and is seeing — the direct and indirect effects of climate change. Its submission, introduced by DFES Commissioner Darren Klemm, acknowledges the effects of greenhouse gas emissions and how rapidly rising concentrations of CO₂ are contributing to a rise in global average temperature.

"The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has



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set an ambitious target to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees,

however as global emissions continue to rise DFES understands that average temperatures well above this level need to be planned for," the DFES submission says.

"DFES also understands that small increases in global temperatures can make a significant difference to the frequency and size of extreme weather events. It is likely that there is a non-linear (i.e. growth curve) relationship between each increment in global average temperature and the effect on the frequency and size of these events."

DFES is developing its own Climate Change White Paper — looking at energy efficiency, renewable energy sources, carbon neutrality and carbon offsets — and hopes the Climate Health Inquiry's findings will be a

"roadmap" across government, private sector and community.

The Water Corporation has been responding to climate change over the past two decades to ensure Perth has a resilient water supply scheme, building desalination plants in 2006 and 2011.

"Perth has seen climate change happen faster and earlier than almost any major urban area on the planet," Water Corp chief executive Pat Donovan wrote. "Streamflow into dams has reduced from an average of 420 billion litres per year, pre-1975, to an average of 72 billion litres of the past five years. This represents an 83 per cent reduction in average streamflow to Perth's dams. It is projected that winter rainfall will decrease by up to a further 15 per cent by 2030." Its

planning is focused on water efficiency, leak detection, increased recycled water and reducing greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2030.

Health insurer HBF, which has one million members in WA, said a recent study showed the healthcare sector was responsible for 7 per cent of Australia's carbon emissions, with hospitals accounting for about half of these. Its chief health adviser Professor Hugh Dawkins said the financial impacts of climate change would put pressure on premiums and affordability. To mitigate this, HBF is exploring reducing its reliance on "low-value, hospital-based" care and replacing it with services closer to home.

At a local level, the City of Cockburn is drawing up a 10-year climate change mitigation strategy to transition towards electricity from renewable resources in its facilities, looking at establishing micro grids, rolling out energy efficient street lighting, buying hybrid vehicles and investigating the feasibility of a renewable energy park on capped landfill cells. The council's submission, however, does highlight the difficulty of focusing at a local government level. It describes a "doomsday scenario" associated with a two degree temperature rise that would lead to a "pandemic" caused by microorganisms and a global refugee crisis.

Climate change action, such as that outlined to the inquiry, can't be taken without the money collected from your taxes, rates or bills. Or for that matter the shares you own or the products you buy. So instead of joining the online blame game, perhaps the lasting legacy of this summer's bushfire crisis is we each consider our own responsibility in addressing a global challenge.

Peter Law is State Political Editor



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