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Adj. Professor Tarun Weeramanthri
Climate Health WA Enquiry
Department of Health
Public and Aboriginal Health Division
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Dear Professor

RE: CITY SUBMISSION TO THE CLIMATE HEALTH WA INQUIRY

In response to your recent letter inviting the City to provide a written submission to the Climate Health WA Inquiry please find below the City's submission.

Mitigation Measures

It is encouraging to see that the matter of sea level rise and coastal erosion is being considered by the State Government and that an assessment of all of WA to identify erosion hotspots has been carried out. The report 'Coastal Erosion Hotspots' clearly prioritises infrastructure and property that may require expensive protection, since funding will be limited and Local Councils are unable to consider anything beyond their boundaries.

Whilst this is clearly an essential step a broader scale view would enable contemplation of mitigation measures that benefit a number of different local government areas (including those inland) and could reduce adaptation response. An example could be infrastructure that modifies tidal surge in the Swan River thereby reducing costly erosion upstream as well as reducing flooding with the associated increase in mosquito activity. Having said that, Local Governments should be supported to conduct a more detailed assessment of the impact of sea level rise / storm surge patterns on their areas.

There may be a need to review some of the Western Australian Planning Commission State Planning Policies, e.g. Liveable Neighbourhoods, to encourage vegetation retention and greener public realm.

Whilst much has been done in regard to increased bush fire risk, continued effort and research into bushfire response and construction for bushfire etc may increase mitigation efficacy.

Local Government's role in heatwave mitigation may include providing relief drop in centres in community buildings.

Decreasing urban forests are also contributing to heatwave issues. Despite efforts by many local governments in developing urban forest strategies, cover is still reducing leading to greater urban heat island effects. Much greater effort and expenditure (for planting and maintaining trees) as well as changes in land use policies (such as limiting site cover on new lots, provision for deep soil zones, higher density living and leaving aside areas for trees) would be valuable mitigation measures.

Adaptation / Response Measures

Infectious diseases/pandemic

As the climate changes, distribution of vectors of disease such as mosquitos, flies and rodents will change. It appears likely that this will occur gradually however there will be new and emerging diseases potentially causing outbreaks that will require attention. It is difficult to predict where these outbreaks will occur but this highlights the critical need for a public health workforce with local knowledge and the skills to deal with them. Part of this workforce will include Local Government Environmental Health / Public Health Officers

Regulatory Response

The powers in the new Public Health Act and expectations of Environmental Health Officers (EHO's) in emergency situations makes it very clear that both Local Government and State Government will be significantly dependent upon the expertise of EHO's in these scenarios especially if / when a pandemic or other catastrophic event occurs in Perth.

Environmental Health Officers are especially valuable where emergencies and disasters occur due to their experience with pollution, noise, toxicology, food and water safety, contaminated sites, waste management, emergency management, nuisances and infectious disease control.

Under the new Public Health Act the Chief Health Officer of the Department of Health may authorise the use of serious public health incident powers if they are necessary for the purpose of preventing, controlling or abating a serious public health risk. These powers are most likely to be used in the case of infectious disease and allow for such things as closing premises, directing persons to leave or remain at premises, entry into any premises to inspect, search or seize, require cleaning or disinfection of premises, destruction or disposal of items, quarantining of persons, medical treatment of persons and any other action that is reasonably necessary to prevent, control or abate the serious public health risk such as an outbreak of infectious disease.

Heatwaves

Shade, in the form of tree canopy or built form can be a helpful adaptation to the impact of heatwaves. In times of heatwave communities may look to Local Government to provide cool space for vulnerable communities. Clearly this would be reliant on a stable power supply. Western Power has advised their substations do not deal well in heatwaves and if they start losing them (this appears to be probable) then homes will be without power. Given our low standards in terms of energy efficiency and solar passive design in new housing (let alone older housing stock) then we are heavily reliant on air conditioners. In order for emergency evacuation centres to continue to be viable when power was not available they would need to have a backup generator. Clearly this will have cost implications though the lack of suitable cooled refuge could see an increase in hospital admissions.

Increase in mean temperature may make going to parks less attractive resulting in reduced recreation and physical exercise. This could result in higher levels of obesity.

The City may need to reevaluate its Shade Policy which generally only provides shade at larger category playgrounds and this would entail additional installation and maintenance cost.

Changing rainfall patterns may result in restricted groundwater sources which could affect drinking water provision for some communities and / or the level of maintenance of parks and public open spaces which could result in them becoming less attractive to users. This again could result in increased levels of obesity if less people use these as recreation spaces.

The potential for loss of hope and mental health impacts related to not dealing with climate are only going to increase as impacts increase and the options for mitigating more significant impacts become more difficult, more expensive and less effective.

Food Messaging

A reduction in meat consumption at a societal level will contribute to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Meat will become more expensive, and therefore health promotion messaging could focus on the health and environmental benefits of an increase in plant based diets. However, some meat production is likely to continue for instance in areas such as inland Australia. These areas are unlikely to be viable for routine food production but still provide habitat for kangaroos that are consumed by people in small amounts now.

The Health team at the City of Swan is willing to engage in the debate regarding Climate Change and Health adaptation and assist where possible going forward.

If you have any questions please contact David Rosling at

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Yours faithfully

M J Foley
Chief Executive Officer