6 Governing a Climate Emergency

Abstract

Local governments seeking to substantially increase the scale and scope of their response to climate change have been galvanised by the rapid rise of a new movement: the climate emergency. This envisages local government as a starting point for a broader societal transition responding more effectively to climate change. In this chapter, I analyse guidance, produced by activists and early-mover local governments. on what it means to govern in a climate emergency. I identify four common principles: the need for faster action to reduce emissions, new roles for community members in advocacy and governance, the embedding of climate change as a consideration throughout councils and increased collaboration with key actors.

I explore how this has been adapted by Australian local governments through analysis of 95 council motions declaring a climate emergency and 25 local government climate emergency strategies. I find broad alignment between the guidance principles and motions and strategies, though with some variability on the issue of appropriate emissions reduction targets. I note that a challenge for local governments is whether existing business-as-usual forms of climate governance will be sufficient to meet the ambitions of climate emergency motions and strategies.

6.1 Introduction

On 6 December 2016, a Melbourne-based council, the City of Darebin, became the first local government in the world to pass a motion declaring, recognising or acknowledging a climate emergency:

> "Council recognises that we are in a state of climate emergency that requires urgent action by all levels of government, including by local councils."
>
> (City of Darebin 2016)

Since then, another 94 local governments in Australia and more than a thousand jurisdictions and national parliaments, globally, have also declared a climate emergency (Aidt 2019; BBC News 2019). While Australian local governments have been keen to declare, recognise or acknowledge a climate emergency, it is unclear what this means for climate governance practices and related internal processes. If local governments wish to move beyond symbolism of declaration and act in a manner befitting a climate emergency, how will those practices and processes change? In particular, and the

primary focus of this chapter, will declaring and acting on a climate emergency change the relationship between local governments and the communities they serve?

As set out in Chapter 4, Australian local government climate governance practices (regulation, service delivery, infrastructure provision, advocacy, community engagement) are shaped through their interaction with other practices. While local governments influence households through climate governance practices, so do the everyday activities undertaken by households shape local government climate governance, as noted in the example of the rise of rooftop solar as part of a new practice: distributed renewable energy production (Meiklejohn et al. 2018). The most recent iteration of an external influence upon local government climate governance practices is the climate emergency movement.

This movement has evolved from activist writing and advocacy that critiques existing climate change responses (particularly mitigation to reduce emissions) as inadequate to meet the threat of climate change (Spratt and Sutton 2008). It seeks both to prompt local governments to accelerate their own level of response to climate change as well as act as a foundation for more radical shifts in relevant systems of practice (Sutton 2017). By contrast to the governance-based networks, such as C40 and Cities for Climate Protection, that have been characteristic of local government climate movements since the early 2000s (Lee and van de Meene 2012; Trencher et al. 2016; Fitzgibbons and Mitchell 2019; Nielsen and Papin 2020; Lindseth 2004), climate emergency has more in common with 'bottom up' activism in which local governments have played an initial role as a focus for debate and action on contentious social issues, such as the declaration of nuclear-free zones and rejection of the current date of Australia Day (Wittner 2009; Busbridge and Chou 2020).

While climate activist writings have made the case for greater speed and reach in local government climate governance, it is not clear how this translates into action. Are local governments being asked to do what they currently do but faster and on a larger scale? Or are new governance roles expected and, if so, what might these look like? In this chapter, I consider how initial guidance to answer these questions has been developed (Sutton 2017; City of Darebin 2018) and how it has been interpreted by Australian local governments as they experiment with different approaches. I pay particular attention to the implications of governing in a climate emergency for the relationship between local governments and the communities they serve.

I begin by exploring the development of the climate emergency movement, drawing on activist writings and secondary data in the form of public interviews given by key figures, that frame the concept of a climate emergency. I then examine four guidance documents, produced by climate activists and early-mover local governments that set out visions and strategies defining climate emergency governance. From these I identify a set of common climate emergency governance principles: a deeper and accelerated reduction in community-based greenhouse gas emissions, new

roles for the community in responding to and co-managing the climate emergency and the need to embed climate emergency governance throughout all local government practices.

In understanding how this guidance squares with local government activity, I examine both council motions declaring a climate emergency and subsequent strategies that have been developed by local governments to assess whether these guidance principles have relevance. In analysing the motions to declare, recognise or acknowledge a climate emergency by 95 Australian local governments, I pay particular attention to language used regarding the urgency of action, the role of the community and any identified climate governance practices. This is supplemented by a similar analysis of 25 local government strategies that have been developed following declaration motions by councils. The strategies were selected through desktop research and through my role within a local government network of declared Australian councils: Climate Emergency Australia (Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action 2020). These strategies were selected for analysis as they address both corporate and community greenhouse gas emissions and specify roles for the community, as opposed to those local government strategies that only focus upon corporate emissions from the council itself. With regard to the strategies, I have compared the emergency forms of climate governance practices (in particular, community engagement) and internal process practices with earlier versions outlined in council climate change strategies. I distinguish between how these practices were performed previously and whether the declaration of a climate emergency has altered them in any significant manner.

6.2 Climate Emergency Movement and Guidance

While a need for urgency in responding to climate change has long been a mainstay of environmental activists, the notion of accelerating the scale and broadening the scope of societal responses in an emergency setting emerged in popular writings in the mid-2000s (Spratt and Sutton 2008). This framing draws upon previous rapid historical transitions in response to immediate threats, most notably the transformation of the US economy from a domestic to a military focus during the Second World War (Brown 2006; Gilding 2011). From this, the concept of *climate emergency* as a motivating factor has been shaped into a strategy focused upon local government. Action at this level is seen as part of a mobilisation campaign that pushes support for more climate emergency declarations and aligned actions ‘upwards, outwards and downwards’:

> “Outwards to go from council to council to council, municipal area to municipal area. Once you get a pack of municipalities engaged in this and showing it can be done, then you can start pushing up. They can be lobbying up to the state government, territory governments and up to the national government. So, that’s the upwards. Downwards is

> delivery of solutions and it's also building and enhancing and maintaining the mandate, and it's also mobilising the people who live in the area."
>
> (Sutton 2018)

In addition, local governments have also been encouraged to consider 'inwards' to reflect upon and transform how councils perform climate governance practices (Aidt 2019). This approach aligns with and builds upon existing relationships and practices performed by Australian local governments, including networking with peers, advocacy to higher tiers of government and community engagement to reduce household-based greenhouse gas emissions (Moloney and Horne 2015; Tilbury et al. 2005). The climate emergency movement seeks to instil a greater sense of urgency within these activities:

> "Business as usual is not going to get us where we need to be in terms of emissions reduction and then drawdown. If we're in an emergency situation, then two years for simple actions is not okay and we needed a new plan that really reflected that."
>
> (Rennie 2018)

Local governments are encouraged to make a formal declaration recognising a climate emergency in order to drive local action but also to influence other stakeholders and higher tiers of government to shift their own responses into emergency mode (Sutton 2017). Declarations have been made by local governments across Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, France, Germany and Belgium (Aidt 2019). This action has also extended to regional and national governments and parliaments (Mazengarb 2019; Agence France-Presse 2019; Government of Catalonia 2019).

A lack of clarity as to what governing in a climate emergency mode looks like has left the movement vulnerable to criticism, particularly in terms of what it might mean for democratic norms and processes (Williams 2019). Such critiques note that the historical example that the movement draws upon (i.e. the militarisation of society and economy during wartime in the United States) (Brown 2006) involved the suspension of liberties in order to respond effectively to an external threat (Sparrow 2019). It should be noted that despite these concerns, there is no evidence that climate emergency advocates seek such anti-democratic measures (Cretney 2019). Indeed, climate emergency movement guidance materials encourage greater degrees of community participation in the development of climate solutions (Council Action in the Climate Emergency 2018).

In this section, I consider four primary guidance documents that have sought to provide clarity for how local governments should govern in a climate emergency. These documents do not represent the definitive word on climate emergency governance. Rather, they are what is currently available to Australian local governments seeking to understand the implications of declaring a climate emergency and mapping a way forward. The guidance documents are:

- *Local-first implementation* (Sutton 2017);
- *Resource for Effective Local Government Climate Emergency Response: Darebin Council's Climate Emergency Journey* (City of Darebin 2018);
- *Understanding Climate Emergency and Local Government* (Spratt 2019); and
- *Local Government Climate Emergency Toolkit* (Martin 2020).

The first guidance material emerging from the activist community, Sutton's (2017) *Local-first implementation* is less a 'how-to-do-it' guide and more an exploration of principles to achieve faster and deeper societal change. It emphasises the need for 'fully-adequate goals' tied to climate science to be used as a foundation for action, for local government and community advocacy to play a role in supporting local action as well as advocating the concept of climate emergency to other stakeholders (Sutton 2017). Roles for local government are outlined within a framework of acting 'upwards' (encouraging and supporting more rapid change within state and Federal governments and filling gaps when higher tiers of government are slow to act), 'outwards' (encouraging other local governments to declare a climate emergency and coordinating with other relevant professional groups, such as architects, planners and engineers that have also declared) and 'downwards' (delivering local projects and building a climate emergency mandate within the community) (Sutton 2017).

The City of Darebin's *Resource for Effective Local Government Climate Emergency Response: Darebin Council's Climate Emergency Journey* (City of Darebin 2018) builds from Sutton's (2017) initial guidance and also draws upon its own experiences as an early mover in climate emergency governance. This resource identifies five processes: declare a climate emergency, embed climate emergency action into council governance practices, mobilise and build a climate emergency mandate within the community and with stakeholders from relevant systems of practice, reach out to other councils and advocate to state and Federal governments (City of Darebin 2018). These processes align with the 'upwards, outwards and downwards' approach of Sutton (2017), but provide greater detail on the implications for climate governance practices. This includes specific actions such as switching to 100 per cent renewable energy for council operations, redrafting procurement policies, embedding climate change into strategic planning, creating a circular economy and building community resilience (City of Darebin 2018).

Spratt's (2019) *Understanding Climate Emergency and Local Government* also sets out specific approaches to be undertaken, including ensuring that emissions reduction targets align with climate science and, consequently, that councils should set a target of net negative emissions in less than ten years. The guidance also specifies additional internal governance practice changes, including building the capacity of staff and embedding climate emergency as a theme within the council's strategic plan (Spratt 2019). Finally, Spratt (2019) delineates between business-as-usual and a climate emergency response for local government, identifying differences such as the speed of transition, whether climate

understandings form an integral part of council business and that all available resources are committed to the response.

The final guidance document, Martin's (2020) *Local Government Climate Emergency Toolkit*, was developed by a former councillor at a climate emergency-declared council in Melbourne (Moreland City Council 2018) and reflects that experience converting the ambitions of the climate emergency movement into governance practices. The toolkit identifies key decision-makers within council and the community (and their roles, responsibilities and influence), key local government documents (e.g. strategic plan, annual budget and departmental strategies) and how they can be shaped (Martin 2020). It sets out a series of recommended actions that cover both internal process governance practices (such as ensuring transparency in decision-making) and specific systems of practice (such as transport, waste and energy) in which local government plays a role (Martin 2020).

From my analysis of these guidance documents, a set of common principles emerges. These include:

- a need for faster action on climate change;
- a new role for the communities served by local government, including advocacy to other tiers of government and co-management of a climate emergency response with local government;
- embedding climate emergency governance responses throughout local government practices, and
- the need for collaboration with external stakeholders.

To understand how these principles translate into action, I now turn to local government declarations and strategies that reflect the emerging practice of climate emergency governance. As there has been limited time and opportunity for action by local governments, the climate emergency declaration motions and subsequent strategies of Australian councils represent commitments and aspirations rather than hard evidence at this stage. This is a limitation of early research and analysis of climate emergency governance (Davidson et al. 2020; Chou 2020). However, within these statements of commitment and initial strategies, it is possible to identify emerging elements of climate emergency governance as a practice, how it differs from existing forms of climate governance and its implications for the relationship between the council and its community.

6.3 Climate Emergency Motions and Strategies

Developed and voted on by councillors, council motions represent declarations of intent by the political arm of local governments (Marshall 2003). Climate emergency motions (whether declaring, acknowledging or recognising) represent a re-commitment by local governments to acting on climate change in a manner not seen since the Cities for Climate Protection program in the early 2000s (Lindseth 2004). While motions set climate governance practices within an emergency framing, the scope and ambition of the council and the specific climate governance practices to be performed sits

within climate emergency strategies, developed subsequently (Chou 2020; Meiklejohn et al. 2021). The form of local government climate strategies has remained broadly consistent over time while the content has been shaped by external forces, including shifting emphases on the need to act on climate change at higher tiers of government (Nelson 2015) and the emergence of popular emissions-reduction technology in the form of rooftop solar (Meiklejohn et al. 2018). The climate emergency movement represents the latest such influence.

To understand how local government climate governance practices are being shaped by the climate emergency movement, I have analysed 95 council motions declaring a climate emergency and 25 climate emergency strategies. I have used the principles identified in the guidance emerging from both activist writers and the early experiences of declared councils (i.e. a need for faster and more comprehensive action on climate change, new roles for communities, the need for a whole of local government response to climate change and increased collaboration with key actors) as a framework to identify what is included and what may be missing from council motions and strategies. In particular, I focus on what climate emergency forms of governance mean for the relationship between local governments and their communities, whether directly, in the form of stated roles, or indirectly, as a consequence of changes to other governance practices.

6.3.1 Faster and More Comprehensive Action

The four climate emergency guidance documents establish positions of ambition beyond that of most current local government strategies. The City of Darebin guidance states that a net zero community-based emissions by 2050 target is "not compatible with a climate emergency response" (City of Darebin 2018, p. 10). Martin (2020) suggests a combined community and corporate emissions target of net zero by 2030 with a best practice target of net negative emissions (i.e. removing more emissions than emitting) by the same date. This aligns with Spratt (2019) who states that local governments should establish a net negative target consistent with the science, ideally within ten years. Sutton notes that "for any temperature target at or below 1.5°C there is no longer a carbon budget left, and so the emission target should be zero immediately" (Sutton 2017, p. 18).

The concept of a carbon budget, in which each council is proportionally responsible for its part of the global carbon emission reduction budget (City of Moreland 2014), is challenged by these more radical stances. Notably, the City of Darebin abandons the carbon budget approach arguing that it is inadequate for the scale of response required:

> "The problem with the whole concept of carbon budget is that it basically says, 'only do what you need to do as your share of emissions of total global emissions.' It sounds nice but it actually means that there's no ambition, there's no innovation."

(McCarthy 2018)

Few councils have followed Darebin's lead. While some have committed to net zero community-based emissions by 2030 (Bass Coast Shire Council 2019; City of Yarra 2017; City of Holdfast Bay 2019), this is often with the caveat that some of the emissions reduction will be achieved through carbon offsets located outside the municipality. Other councils have established less ambitious targets whether achieving net zero emissions from the community by 2040 (Blacktown City Council 2020; City of Moreland 2019; City of Melbourne 2019) or even net zero by 2050 (Denmark Shire Council 2019; Hunters Hill Council 2020). This suggests there is no common understanding on what a suitable climate emergency target should be, in practice.

Bass Coast Shire Council (2020) frames its net zero by 2030 target as one that is 'shared' with the community. Actions have been identified and evaluated on a marginal abatement cost curve (Tomaschek 2015) with preference given to those adjustments to everyday practices that produce the greatest emissions reduction for the lowest cost, in this case: the adoption of electric vehicles and residential rooftop solar (Bass Coast Shire Council 2020). The City of Yarra supplements its net zero by 2030 target with targets for specific climate governance practices, including engaging 10,000 households and doubling the percentage of households with rooftop solar by 2024 (City of Yarra 2020). Achieving such targets falls within the remit of existing forms of local government climate governance practices such as community engagement (e.g. workshops to promote these technologies), advocacy (encouraging incentives from higher tiers of government) and regulations (such as planning rules to protect the effectiveness of rooftop solar).

However, it is less clear from the strategies that climate emergency targets can be attained using business-as-usual climate governance practices. Bass Coast Shire Council's marginal cost assessment notes that the most effective action to reduce community-based emissions is actually through large-scale windfarms (Bass Coast Shire Council 2020), typically the concern of private companies with limited scope for community involvement. The City of Yarra notes that, in addition to carbon offsets, the "government policy interventions and structural changes needed to drive this transition are outside of Council's direct control" (City of Yarra 2020, p. 27). Such admissions have long been part of Australian local government climate strategies with levels of dependence on the actions of others varying over time in response to policy shifts at higher tiers of government (Meiklejohn et al. 2021).

For community engagement practices, meeting the demands of an ambitious climate emergency response could directly influence current practice, favouring technological interventions, such as the installation of rooftop solar (Vare and Scott 2007). The need to act with a greater sense of urgency can also favour regulatory and infrastructure climate governance practices (e.g. closing off roads to discourage private vehicle usage) ahead of community engagement, for their ability to lock-in emissions reduction. While such actions align with super wicked solutions criteria (Levin et al. 2012), they also leave climate emergency responses open to the criticisms that such framing can be 'anti-

democratic' favouring emissions reduction over genuine participation (Sparrow 2019; Williams 2019). These tendencies can be offset by new roles for the community in climate emergency governance, as set out in the following section.

6.3.2 The Community as Actor, Activist and Governor

As noted in Chapter 4, local government climate change community engagement is based upon an assumption that the threat of climate change will motivate individuals to act. This assumption aligns with behaviour change-based methodologies in which individuals are positioned as independent actors as part of a collective response to climate change (Meiklejohn et al. 2021). As delivered by Australian local governments, climate change community engagement practices focus on building the knowledge and skills of individuals to take action to reduce emissions (Wiseman et al. 2010; Tilbury et al. 2005). By contrast, other potential climate governance practices which the community could perform (notably, advocacy on climate issues) are instead performed by the local government on behalf of their communities (City of Boroondara 2009; Hobsons Bay City Council 2015).

In considering how communities are engaged and involved in responding to the climate emergency, Australian local governments frame three broad sets of practices in their motions and strategies. The first is altering existing forms of household practices to reduce emissions and participating in collective emissions reduction practices, such as community energy projects to procure renewable energy. The second involves encouraging greater advocacy by members of the community to other levels of government and stakeholders, to strengthen responses to the climate emergency. The third refers to community involvement in governance practices to develop and co-manage the council's climate emergency response.

With regard to the first set of practices, the specific local government community engagement practices set out in climate emergency plans are often little altered from those typical of traditional climate change strategies. They include supporting households to install rooftop solar (Inner West Council 2019), switch to renewable energy powered electricity (Brimbank City Council 2020) and undertake energy efficiency measures (Maribyrnong City Council 2020). However, by contrast to business-as-usual strategies, community engagement practices play a far smaller role in climate emergency strategies. Instead, climate emergency strategies place greater emphasis on those governance practices capable of driving broader systemic change, including alterations to urban development plans to encourage the uptake of solar, the installation of electric vehicle charging stations and supporting the development of zero-emissions industries (City of Newcastle 2020); the development of virtual power plants, encouraging divestment from fossil fuels amongst superannuation companies and advocating for and supporting a transition away from gas to electricity in residential developments (City of Melbourne 2019); and developing partnerships with electricity

retailers to offer renewable energy to households and creating a zero carbon housing developments planning framework (City of Yarra 2020).

In some instances, local governments have been driven by strong community involvement in the creation of the climate emergency strategy. Development of the Western Australian Shire of Augusta-Margaret River's strategy commenced with a climate action summit in 2019, managed by an existing sustainability advisory committee with a remit to create a "whole of community approach to reducing greenhouse emissions and moderating the impacts of climate change" (Shire of Augusta-Margaret River 2020, p. 18). The summit produced a series of priority actions including the development of a major community renewable energy project, creation of a renewable energy power sharing scheme and a transition within local agriculture towards regenerative farming (Shire of Augusta-Margaret River 2020).

In addition to emissions reduction actions, the second set of practices set out in climate emergency strategies emphasises the role of the community in supporting and delivering advocacy to other stakeholders. Bass Coast Shire Council notes that households can "advocate for stronger climate change action by State and Federal governments" (Bass Coast Shire Council 2020, p. 27), Moreland City Council pledges to "facilitate networking and capacity-building amongst local and regional community groups and agencies active in campaigning for climate action" (City of Moreland 2019, p. 9) while the City of Greater Dandenong seeks to build the "capacity of members to be active citizens working collectively for change" (City of Greater Dandenong 2020, p. 31). The challenge for local governments is translating such lofty statements into concrete climate governance practices, including consideration of what form advocacy to higher tiers of government takes, how is it to be organised and how will it be assessed as to its effectiveness?

The third set of practices is that of the community playing a role in governing the ongoing response to the climate emergency. As noted, the climate emergency movement is distinguished from other climate movements involving local governments, which have taken the form of Australian councils signing up to global networks (Lindseth 2004). By contrast, grass roots communities have been active in encouraging local governments to declare, recognise or acknowledge climate emergencies through local advocacy (Hobsons Bay City Council 2019; Queenscliffe Borough Council 2019). Such activity may raise expectations not only that council will be expected to meet the pledges set out in their climate emergency strategies but also that the community should play a strong role in governing the climate emergency response with council.

Local governments have responded through the creation of new joint management structures or incorporating the responsibility of governing council's climate emergency response into existing advisory groups. These include creating a climate emergency advisory committee (Alexandrina Council 2019), a community-led climate emergency guidance group (Byron Shire Council 2018) and a climate emergency round table (City of Darwin 2019). Brimbank City Council sets out a series of

'People Power' actions, including the establishment of a citizens assembly (Brimbank City Council 2020). The degree of authority granted to these groupings varies between local governments. Community concerns about and the capacity to govern the climate emergency is likely to present an ongoing challenge for local governments.

6.3.3 Collaborating, Advocating and Embedding

Motions declaring a climate emergency and subsequent climate emergency strategies produced by Australian local governments are notable for a shift away from climate change being considered as just a sustainability issue, as is more typical of earlier local government strategies, to a broader recognition of its impacts upon council assets and operations and on the well-being of the community (City of Yarra 2020; City of Moreland 2019; City of Newcastle 2020). While this has resulted in an increased emphasis upon adaptation to the current and projected impacts of climate change (City of Charles Sturt 2020; City of Launceston 2019; City of Greater Dandenong 2020), it has also emphasised the urgency of reducing emissions as quickly as possible. Together, these influences are encouraging local governments to change the nature of their climate governance practices, favouring some (in particular, advocacy) over others but also seeking to integrate climate responses throughout all aspects of council operations.

The emissions reduction actions set out in climate emergency strategies are notable for their increased focus on systemic elements contributing to the production of greenhouse gas emissions, rather than viewing the individual as holding primary responsibility, as was the case with earlier strategies (City of Moreland 2014; City of Fremantle 2014). In this new framing, local government climate governance practices continue to support the actions of individuals but also seek new avenues for mitigating emissions, in particular through collaboration and advocacy. While collaboration with relevant stakeholders to reduce emissions is present in earlier strategies (City of Moonee Valley 2013; City of Port Phillip 2007; City of Sydney 2013), climate emergency strategies are more specific in naming potential partners and the roles they might play (City of Moreland 2019; City of Moonee Valley 2020). The precise nature of this collaboration is not defined in the motions and strategies, creating space for experimentation in future climate governance.

An emphasis upon increased advocacy is recognised as a key difference between climate emergency governance and business-as-usual climate governance (City of Darebin 2018; Shire of Augusta-Margaret River 2020; City of Newcastle 2020). The climate emergency guidance documents focus on the need for other levels of government to also declare a climate emergency and develop aligned actions (Martin 2020; Spratt 2019). In their motions, local governments also identify advocacy to higher tiers of government as a key element of a climate emergency response, partly a recognition that addressing climate change as an emergency sits beyond the scope of just the local government sector

(City of Adelaide 2019). These include both a general call for other levels of government to act with greater urgency on climate change as well as specific advocacy requests, including changes to state planning regulations (Blacktown City Council 2020) and a Federal price on carbon (Waverley Council 2019). By contrast to collaborative measures, how advocacy practices are to be performed is more clearly defined, including identifying the need to work with other local governments (City of Darwin 2019; City of Greater Dandenong 2020; City of Kingston 2020) and through peak bodies (City of Ballarat 2018; Cardinia Shire Council 2019; City of Hobart 2019; Town of Victoria Park 2018).

Finally, embedding climate change responses throughout local government operations requires councils to not only consider relevant practices, but also the governance structures that are likely to increase the efficacy of those responses. Climate emergency councils have sought to achieve this through the integration of climate change considerations within strategic corporate plans that provide overall guidance for council (Kloot 2001). In addition to developing and resourcing a separate climate action plan, Cardinia Shire Council, in Melbourne's south east, seeks to ensure that "climate change adaptation and mitigation are emphasised as a key priority in the 2021-2025 council plan" (Cardinia Shire Council 2019, p. 372). Broken Hill City Council, in regional New South Wales, has pledged to build climate emergency into a "review being undertaken around the Community Strategic Plan" (Broken Hill City Council 2019, p. 2), the City of Ryde, in inner Sydney, calls for a report to Council that "examines how Council plans, policies and works programs can address the climate emergency, and ensure this is embedded into future Council strategic plans" (City of Ryde 2019, p. 6) and Campbelltown City Council, on the fringe of Adelaide, seeks to position climate change as a "key priority as part of Council's Strategic Plan and periodically report on progress against the defined actions" (Campbelltown City Council 2019, p. 5). In addition, some local governments specifically direct that climate change be considered in other relevant strategies, particularly emergency management (Indigo Shire Council 2019; Moreland City Council 2018).

Together, these altered roles for local government may not only change how they govern climate change but may also indirectly influence the relationship with their communities. Increased advocacy by local government aligns with a re-framed role for the community that places a greater emphasis on this practice. Greater collaboration creates an opportunity for community organisations and representatives to co-manage the climate emergency response. Embedding climate change across council operations suggests a new form of business-as-usual in which climate considerations are an integral part of what Australian local governments do, raising the profile of climate change in all aspects of the lives of their community members.

6.4 Conclusion

Governing in a climate emergency is at an experimental stage for Australian local governments, as they seek to translate the guidance provided by activist writers and the early-mover councils into action (Sutton 2017; Spratt 2019; Martin 2020). Local governments have sought to act upon the common principles established by this guidance: the need to act more urgently to reduce emissions, managing a changing role for the community, integrating climate change throughout all council activities and collaborating with key actors. This is expressed through motions to declare, recognise or acknowledge a climate emergency and the subsequent strategies developed to implement new forms of climate governance.

The first principle of a faster, more thorough reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, is reflected in the strengthened community emissions reduction targets established by local governments. My analysis has demonstrated that there is a lack of consistency between climate emergency councils in understanding what a suitable target should be with some councils aiming for net zero emissions by 2030 while others reflect broader national policy positions of attaining the same target by 2050 (Climate Council 2020). The proposed forms of climate governance practices, identified in the analysed strategies, represent marginal shifts from what might be considered business-as-usual. I have noted that the climate emergency movement is distinguished from other climate initiatives with which local governments have engaged, as communities have demonstrated a greater willingness to play a more active role in its development and on-going governance. Community groups have played a key role in prompting councils to declare a climate emergency as well as in the development of climate emergency strategies. While local governments have noted the need to involve community members in on-going governance structures, it is not clear to what degree councils may be willing to share control of implementation of strategies.

Finally, as evidenced by their motions and strategies, the declaration of a climate emergency has prompted local governments to consider their own role and performance of climate governance practices. In particular, there is a stated desire for increased advocacy to higher tiers of government and other relevant stakeholders, by both council and the community, and greater collaboration to deliver outcomes. In addition, local governments have recognised that a climate emergency framing requires a whole-of-council response.

From a super wicked problems perspective, declaring and acting on a climate emergency still faces the same complexity factors particular to climate change (Levin et al. 2007), although my analysis shows there are indications that these are considered in emerging forms of climate governance. While local governments remain a comparatively weak form of government in Australia's federal system, the shift in climate emergency strategies away from an emphasis on the individual to addressing systemic issues is a recognition of the scale of the problem. The principle of increased collaboration with other actors (including other local governments as well as stakeholders in relevant systems of practice) reflects how larger-scale responses might be generated. Whether proposed solutions meet

the super wicked solutions criteria of being ‘sticky’ able to be embedded within target audiences and capable of spreading rapidly to new audiences, is yet to be defined. This will only become clear if and when local governments move from pledges to action.

Local government motions and strategies responding to a climate emergency are declarations of intent regarding ambitions of councils and provide initial guidance as to how climate governance practices are to be enacted. What is unclear, at this point, is whether the sentiments expressed in their motions and strategies can be adequately delivered by approaches to climate governance that have been typical of past strategies and activities or whether climate emergency declarations are empty statements lacking a framework capable of delivering effective action (Chou 2020). In short, can business-as-usual forms of climate governance deliver non-business-as-usual outcomes? If not, what alternative approaches might achieve the deep and rapid reductions in emissions required of the climate emergency?

In the final chapter of this thesis, I explore one possible structure for developing and managing such approaches. Recognising the value of practices as a way to think about units of activities and their relationships, I integrate Watson’s (2012) systems of practice within the transition management cycle (Kemp et al. 2007). This produces a governance framework that directly addresses the elements of climate emergency governance (faster and more comprehensive emissions reduction, new roles for the community, the need to embed climate change throughout local government and increased collaboration with stakeholders to address systemic issues), identified in my analysis of local government climate emergency motions of declaration and strategies.