



Tasmanian Council of Social Service Inc.

Tasmania's Draft Climate Change Action Plan 2023-2025

April 2023



**INTEGRITY
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About TasCOSS

TasCOSS' vision is for one Tasmania, free of poverty and inequality where everyone has the same opportunity. Our mission is two-fold: to act as the peak body for the community services industry in Tasmania; and to challenge and change the systems, attitudes and behaviours that create poverty, inequality and exclusion.

Our membership includes individuals and organisations active in the provision of community services to Tasmanians on low incomes or living in vulnerable circumstances. TasCOSS represents the interests of our members and their service users to government, regulators, the media and the public. Through our advocacy and policy development, we draw attention to the causes of poverty and disadvantage, and promote the adoption of effective solutions to address these issues.

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Introduction

TasCOSS welcomes this opportunity to provide a response to *Tasmania's Draft Climate Change Action Plan 2023-2025* (the Draft Plan). Tackling the climate crisis requires partnership, and Tasmania's community services industry stands ready and willing to play a proactive role in coordinated efforts to build our state's resilience to both the acute and gradual impacts of climate change.

Background

We know that the effects of climate change have disproportionate impacts on people living in circumstances of vulnerability; particularly those in poverty, having poor quality housing or living with disability.¹ The community services industry plays a significant role in assisting people in vulnerable circumstances such as these to live *A Good Life* – the opportunity to do more than spend each day just getting by.² Organisations in our industry deliver services such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support, aged care, alcohol and other drug/addiction support, child and youth wellbeing, community development, crisis support (such as emergency food relief and accommodation), disability support, early childhood education and care, family and sexual violence support, financial support, housing and homelessness services, mental health and migration support.

Our industry is therefore at the forefront of supporting those individuals, households and communities who are likely to be worst affected by both the immediate and the longer-term impacts of climate change.

Based on consultations with our members – including as part of Tasmanian Government-commissioned work to understand how community services supported Tasmanians through the COVID-19 pandemic – TasCOSS offers a number of recommendations for consideration. These relate to Priority areas 2 and 3 in the Draft Plan, but may also be relevant to future reviews of the *Tasmanian Disaster Resilience Strategy 2020-2025*.

Key Issues

Priority area 2 – Transition and innovation

A fair and inclusive energy transition

TasCOSS welcomes the acknowledgement in the Draft Plan that we must “*make the most of opportunities to reduce our emissions, and support households, businesses and industry through the transition to a low emissions economy.*”³ The faster we can cut emissions the more climate damage we can avoid.

The *Draft Tasmanian Future Gas Strategy* identifies fossil gas as a “*not insignificant source of greenhouse gas emissions in Tasmania, accounting for around 5 per cent of Tasmania's gross*

¹ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner (2020) *Persons with disabilities disproportionately affected by climate change*.

² TasCOSS (2023) <<https://tascoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/A-Good-Life-Domains-Goals-Descriptors-February-2023.pdf>>.

³ Climate Change Office (2023), *Tasmania's Draft Climate Change Action Plan 2023-25*, Tasmanian Government, p16.

emissions”.⁴ This presents a real opportunity for the Draft Plan to include stronger actions to phase out the use of fossil gas, as there are renewable alternatives to fossil gas use available and more affordable for households that will accelerate a reduction in emissions.

Recommendation: The Tasmanian Government introduces a moratorium on new gas connections for residential customers and a ten-year timeframe for the phasing out of fossil gas for residential use.

TasCOSS also urges greater investment to support the electrification of low-income households. The Draft Plan identifies the Energy Saver Loan Scheme and No Interest Loan Scheme as emissions reductions measures to support households, however, neither of these measures are viable options for households unable to withstand the financial pressure of upfront payments, additional debt or repayments. Additionally, these schemes are not appropriate for renters living in private rental or public housing, as they do not have the rights or ability to change gas fixtures or install permanent upgrades such as electric appliances, hot water and heat pumps that are the responsibility of landlords.

Recommendation: That the Tasmanian Government develops a gas substitution program for households on low incomes that removes barriers for fossil gas users converting appliances and switching to efficient, renewable electrification.

Priority area 3 – Adaptation and resilience

Disadvantage in Tasmanian communities

TasCOSS endorses the proposed whole-of-government framework that embeds climate action into all decision making and supports the identification of clear links and overlaps with other Tasmanian Government strategies (for example, Food Security, Population, Housing, Energy, Disaster Resilience) to maximise opportunities for social impact. This should include clear articulation of the socio-economic conditions in Tasmania that make some people more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. For example, 20 per cent of Tasmanians are experiencing food insecurity,⁵ more than 4,500 people are on the social housing waitlist⁶ and over 2,600 Tasmanians are currently experiencing homelessness.⁷

TasCOSS endorses positive proposed measures in the Draft Plan such as “supporting the community and key groups to adapt and build their resilience to a changing climate through open grant programs.”⁸ We also recommend the extension and expansion of actions undertaken in previous years including upskilling financial counsellors in energy efficiency and energy debt management, reinstatement/completion of the suspended PowerSmart Homes program and continuation of the electric vehicle stamp duty waiver (currently set to expire in July 2023).

⁴ Renewables, Climate and Future Industries Tasmania (2022), *Draft Tasmanian Future Gas Strategy*, Tasmanian Government, p11.

⁵ UTAS (Dec 2022) https://www.utas.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1630662/TTP8-Food-insecurity.pdf

⁶ Homes Tasmania Dashboard (Mar 2023) https://www.homestasmania.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0038/268949/Housing-Dashboard-January-2023.pdf

⁷ TasCOSS (Mar 2023) <https://tascoss.org.au/governments-stark-homelessness-admission-highlights-inadequate-policy-response/>

⁸ Climate Change Office (2023), *Tasmania’s Draft Climate Change Action Plan 2023-25*, Tasmanian Government, p25.

Recommendation: That the proposed Statewide Risk Assessments articulate the social risks and hazards of the climate crisis in Tasmania given current levels of disadvantage among the Tasmanian community.

Incorporation of Aboriginal perspectives

TasCOSS recognises lutruwita/Tasmania as Aboriginal land, and as such, advocates that all policies that may impact its peoples, lands, air and waters are developed with full participation and consideration of local Aboriginal people and their unique knowledge, culture and practices.

TasCOSS therefore welcomes proposed social measures such as ‘working with the Aboriginal community’, although we will welcome further detail and urge an adequate allocation of funding for this crucial work. TasCOSS is particularly supportive of Tasmanian Government policy development that aligns with stated commitments that they:

- ‘Listen, and are guided by Tasmanian Aboriginal people and [learn] from their knowledge and [apply] it to contemporary policy to achieve real outcomes for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Tasmania; and
- Work in partnership with Tasmanian people and communities to bring their voice and views to the centre of government decision making and co-design responses to community priorities.’⁹

Recommendation: That adaptation and resilience activities privilege Tasmanian Aboriginal perspectives and practices, as the First Peoples and custodians of Tasmanian air, lands and waters.

A key industry in disaster response, recovery and resilience

TasCOSS is supportive of the paradigm shift that is currently taking place within Australian emergency management, at all levels, towards a focus on resilience over recovery and specifically on community-led models. This has been identified as a key priority of the Commonwealth Government as well as the Tasmanian Government,^{10,11} and we see evidence of this shift in the Draft Plan.

There remains, however, strong sentiment across Australian society that our leaders must decisively drive and invest in the deeply transformative work of climate action: for example, more than 91 per cent of respondents to the most recent ACOSS Climate Survey asserted that the Federal Government ‘needs to do *much* more’ [TasCOSS’ emphasis] to support Australians to ‘respond, recover and build resilience to extreme weather events’.¹²

Tasmania’s community services organisations have the potential to be valuable partners in this work. Already, these organisations are consistently among the first responders to disasters through the provision of food, housing, financial support, digital access and other services. They are also the last to leave an impacted community; remaining involved with recovery efforts and support through what can

⁹ Tasmanian Government, Department of Premier and Cabinet, *What we do* <<https://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/cpp>>, accessed 6 April 2023.

¹⁰ Australian Government (2021) *National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy 2021-2025*.

¹¹ Tasmanian Government (2020) *Tasmanian Disaster Resilience Strategy 2020-2025*.

¹² Australian Council of Social Service (2022) *ACOSS Community Survey of Climate Change Impacts and Government Actions*.

be long-lasting and devastatingly traumatic impacts, for months, sometimes years, following a major event.

‘Community organisations are key to building resilience and to supporting people and communities during a crisis. They have knowledge and skills that are vital during disasters, crucial in their aftermath, and essential to building community resilience. However, the full value of this sector is not being realised.’¹³

One of the reasons for this, is lack of resourcing to engage in this work. Recent national industry surveys revealed that only 3 per cent of organisations are always able to meet demand in their main service and only 20 per cent of organisations have the full costs of service provision covered by their main funding source.^{14,15} They simply do not have the internal capacity to engage in longer term resilience-building efforts. Organisations will therefore require more resources to bring their considerable expertise to the important work of coordinated planning and resilience building. This has been identified as crucial by the Australian Climate and Health Alliance, which calls on all levels of government to “empower communities and community service organisations to respond and build resilience to climate threats”.¹⁶

Recommendation: That the community services industry be formally recognised as a key partner in Tasmania’s disaster planning and long-term climate resilience work.

Recommendation: That the Statewide Risk Assessments recognise that funding insecurity in the community services industry presents a risk to their ability to both support Tasmanians through the acute impacts of climate change as well as to collaborate in vital resilience building efforts.

Conclusion

The community services industry is at the forefront of supporting individuals, households and communities who are likely to be affected by both the immediate and the longer-term impacts of climate change. People affected by poverty and disadvantage are often the first and hardest hit by the impacts of a changing climate and have the least capacity to cope, adapt and recover.

TasCOSS’ priority is to ensure that the transition to a low carbon future is fast, fair and inclusive. This can be achieved through greater action and investment to support households to reduce emissions, together with ongoing, coordinated partnerships with the community services industry to support all Tasmanians to mitigate and adapt to the increasing and complex threats posed by our changing climate.

¹³ VCOSS (2022) *A healthy climate supporting resilient communities: 2022 Victorian budget analysis.*

¹⁴ ACOSS (2022) *Helping people in need during a cost-of-living crisis: findings from the Australian community sector survey December 2022.*

¹⁵ ACOSS (2022) *Carrying the costs of the crisis: Australia’s community sector through the delta outbreak – an Australian community sector survey report April 2022.*

¹⁶ Climate and Health Alliance (2021) *Healthy, Regenerative and Just: Framework for a national strategy on climate, health and well-being for Australia.*

Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

The Tasmanian Government introduces a moratorium on new gas connections for residential customers and a ten-year timeframe for the phasing out of fossil gas for residential use.

Recommendation 2:

That the Tasmanian Government develops a gas substitution program for households on low incomes that removes barriers for fossil gas users converting appliances and switching to efficient, renewable electrification.

Recommendation 3:

That the proposed Statewide Risk Assessments articulate the social risks and hazards of the climate crisis in Tasmania given current levels of disadvantage among the Tasmanian community.

Recommendation 4:

That adaptation and resilience activities privilege Tasmanian Aboriginal perspectives and practices, as the First Peoples and custodians of Tasmanian air, lands and waters.

Recommendation 5:

That the community services industry be formally recognised as a key partner in Tasmania's disaster planning and long-term climate resilience work.

Recommendation 6:

That the Statewide Risk Assessments recognise that funding insecurity in the community services industry presents a risk to their ability to both support Tasmanians through the acute impacts of climate change as well as to collaborate in vital resilience building efforts.