

In 2020 the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (the Department) commissioned a project to better understand the collective action NSW councils were taking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions both within their own operations and the local community.

The project objectives were to identify the current state of council-led emissions reduction action, and to help define the support required for councils particularly resources, data, tools and capacity building programs. To gather this information, the project included an online survey, focus groups and interviews with industry experts. *This summary paper provides an insight into the main findings from the survey only which was completed in June 2020¹.*

Strong participation and interest from NSW councils

A total of 119 people responded to the survey from 99 councils, as shown in Figure 1. This represents 77% of local councils within NSW. 70% of respondents were regional based with the remaining 30% from Greater Sydney.

This high participation rate meant a good distribution of perspectives across NSW regions. Seven out of the ten regions were well-represented with at least 80% of their local councils participating².

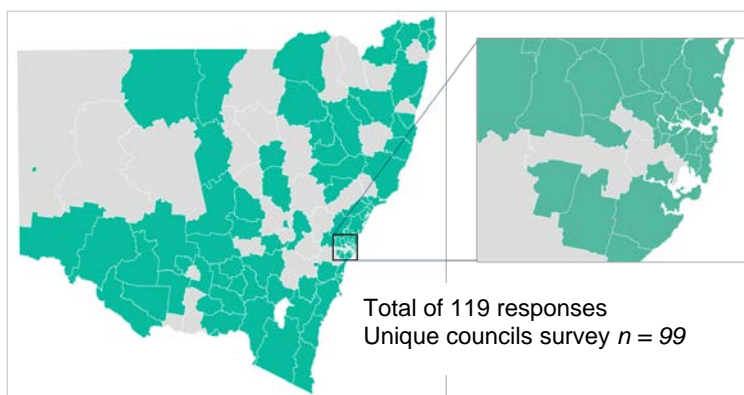


Figure 1 Councils that provided survey responses are indicated in green.

The survey respondents came from a diverse range of council departments. Most responses received came from sustainability professionals (37% of responses), however there was also good representation from planning and development staff (15%), environment or natural resource management specialists (13%) and senior executives (12%) which shows the growing recognition of emissions reduction activities as priorities for councils.

Addressing operational and community emissions

- **While action on operational emissions continues to mature, there is momentum building in addressing community emissions:** 60% of respondents are making progress or consider themselves leaders on operational emissions whereas only 23% of respondents say the same regarding community emissions. While progress is slow, 1 in 2 respondents (48%) said they are starting to take action on community emissions.
- **Addressing operational emissions can help build capacity within councils to address community emissions:** A common approach for councils in addressing emissions has been to start by making progress on operational emissions and then looking at community emissions. This is evident in the survey responses where 62% of Greater Sydney respondents said they are making progress on operational emissions. For community emissions, this was 38%. Regionally, progress on operational emissions dropped to 42% and 8% for community emissions.
- **Strong opportunities to collaborate and advance quickly for councils that are just starting out:** 35% of respondents are yet to start or just starting their journey on addressing operational emissions. For community emissions, this number is even higher with 69% of respondents yet to start or just starting. These councils have

¹ Figures and results reported are correct at the time of the survey.

² To ensure equal representation in instances where multiple responses were received from some councils, rules were applied during quantitative data analysis.

a good opportunity to collaborate with other councils at the same stage and quickly advance through peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing from councils with similar emissions profiles.

Setting targets and developing strategies



53%

of respondents have developed (36%) or are developing (17%) a reduction target for their operational emissions.



25%

of respondents have developed (13%) or are developing (12%) a reduction target for their community emissions.

- **Where a target has been set, 'net zero' is the common goal:** Across both operational and community emissions, the most popular reduction target is to reach net zero emissions. 16 councils from Greater Sydney and 18 councils regionally have set a goal for net zero operational emissions. 8 councils from Greater Sydney and 7 regionally have set net zero community emissions target.
- **Councils are setting ambitious timeframes to achieve net zero:** For operational emissions to be net zero, 2030 and 2050 are the most common years set to achieve it (11 councils each) followed by 2025 (6) and 2040 (6)). For community emissions to be net zero, 2040 and 2050 are the most common years (6 each) followed by 2025 and 2030 (1 each).

Taking action on emissions

- **Strong consensus on what actions to take to reduce operational emissions:** 90% of respondents are installing on-site solar or other renewables as well as undertaking energy efficiency upgrades for buildings/public lighting/waste-water treatment plant/aquatic centres for their own operations. Following these actions are emissions monitoring (68%) and efficiency audits (61%). Outside of buildings and infrastructure, action is more limited with about half of all respondents taking action on electric fleet vehicles (42%).
- **Waste-related actions popular among councils to drive reduction of community emissions:** 77% of respondents provide waste education and food organics service and 54% are developing a waste reduction strategy/target. Only roughly half of all respondents have put in place community programs around energy (40%), electric vehicle charging stations (47%) and providing active/community transport (45%).

Application of tools and resources

- **Uptake of software varies regionally:** Use of specialist emissions software varied between regional and Greater Sydney respondents. Only 7 councils were not using specialist emissions software for operational emissions among Greater Sydney respondents as compared to 32 regionally. For community emissions, only 1 council did not use software for community emissions among Greater Sydney respondents as compared to 26 regionally.
- **Specialist emissions software can provide benefits for both operational and community emissions:** For operational emissions, respondents use software for performance monitoring mostly including tracking costs (75%), tracking asset-level consumption (73%) and tracking council-wide consumption (70%). For community emissions, after LGA emissions tracking (62%) software is mostly used to create and implement a strategy (53%) and identify opportunities for intervention (47%).