

Climate Change – NZPI Policy Statement (draft – Dec/2019)

POSITION STATEMENT

NZPI accepts the scientific assessments of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that human activity is changing our global climate, that irreversible change is already locked in and that the planning profession must address the reality of a changing climate.

- NZPI recognises that the decisions we make now as planners in guiding urban and regional development extend far beyond current influences and shape the future environments in which communities will live in.
- NZPI believes that planners working for the different levels of government or in the private sector have a responsibility to integrate planning for climate change into their work and be proactive in the development of mitigation and adaptation strategies to avoid harm and negative impacts to present and future ecosystems, human and non-human populations.
- This Position Statement broadly aligns NZPI with the position of planning organisations internationally (including in the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia).

NZPI acknowledges that the complexities of planning in a changing climate challenges traditional planning approaches, requiring innovation, collaboration and flexible responses. The evolving data and science on climate change impacts and projections, changing technology and community opinion mean that planning systems need to be designed so that they are flexible, and early decisions do not unnecessarily limit potential future responses and actions.

While NZPI expects members to incorporate the best available information and practice into their work, NZPI acknowledges that the planning profession needs to strengthen its understanding of the issues and recognises that current planning systems are underprepared to deal with this long term challenge. Short term planning approaches will not suffice and traditional approaches to planning may need to change. NZPI believes that there should be:

- strong long-term leadership across all levels and sectors to ensure we address climate change and avoid short sighted ‘business as usual’ approaches to planning and development;
- continued research and innovation to develop the necessary tools, processes and data to enable effective planning and decision making;
- strong, effective and integrated policy frameworks to support sound decision making;
- collaborative engagement with all parties impacted by climate change to improve understanding about climate change and involve them in decisions about possible responses;
- new models to planning in a changing climate that support collaboration and partnership approaches across public, private and community sectors and across disciplines, and
- support for local government, as the level of government closest to the community, which will need to engage local communities to implement policies regarding mitigation and adaption in location specific ways.

ABOUT THE ISSUE

The New Zealand Planning Institute notes that there is near-unanimous agreement among climate scientists that human-caused global warming is real and poses risk for human activity and natural systems. It further acknowledges that climate risks and vulnerability are unevenly distributed and generally greater for disadvantaged people and communities.

NZPI acknowledges that the effects of climate change are already being felt and that a changing climate poses significant challenges to our ecosystems, communities and economy. The extent and severity of impacts is projected to vary across the country and includes: more days of extreme weather, more intense storms and cyclones, increases to flooding depths and sea level rise (inundation, storm surge and erosion), more regular drought and longer bushfire seasons. In turn these are likely to impact on our biodiversity, food security, human settlements, wellbeing and economy. More buildings and infrastructure are at risk from sea level change events. Good planning is essential to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and is much less costly and more effective than retrospective action.

Various levels of New Zealand government (National, Regional and District/City) have adopted mitigation and adaptation policies that acknowledge the need to plan for climate change, though overall, NZ's carbon emissions have been on a steady upward trend rising 24% from 1990 levels.

NZPI recognises the need for urgent and deep reductions in greenhouse gas emissions (to meet our Paris commitments) and the need for complementary mitigation and adaptation strategies for reducing and managing the risks presented by climate change. NZPI is concerned that while there is now long-term central government leadership on this issue, a fragmented policy response continues, and there is limited coordination between levels of government. To plan effectively we need alignment, coordination and integration of the planning policies and mitigation and adaptation strategies being employed by local, regional and national governments.

NZPI also believes that a balanced and sustainable framework for managing property rights and community interests in a changing climate needs to be put in place.

PLANNING PRINCIPLES

The following principles should guide planning for climate change:

- Promote strategies that seek to reduce the overall demand for non-renewable sources of energy, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support the shift to renewable energy.
- Adopt multi-disciplinary and collaborative practices, working alongside other professions and governments, to build consensus within communities, develop whole of government responses, and identify consistent and coordinated actions for mitigation and adaptation.
- Work with affected communities and other stakeholders to assess risks and vulnerabilities to climate change and develop appropriately resilient responses.
- Focus on the whole of existing communities and not just new development.
- Take into account the social, economic, physical and ecological outcomes of responses developed, avoiding any unintended consequences and ensuring that the costs and benefits are shared fairly between and within generations.

- Use the best available science and methods and work with researchers, governments and others to develop and adopt the policies, information and tools needed to support planning outcomes.
- Accept the need to adopt long term timeframes, work with uncertainty and embrace innovative and flexible approaches to identify resilient solutions that can be adapted over time.

SPECIFIC ADVOCACY POSITIONS

- NZPI will engage with government's review of planning frameworks and advocate for a hierarchy of national guidance, and regional and local planning, that is consistent with NZPI planning principles, and which will enable climate change strategies and policies to be implemented and their effectiveness and delivery measured efficiently across the country;
- NZPI will follow closely the government's evolving consideration of spatial planning and how it is defined and applied, especially as a tool for mapping climate change related matters and measures and for implementing climate change policies. NZPI needs to develop an approach to spatial planning which strikes a balance between being traditional and highly structured and being more responsive and adaptive, while being consistent with NZPI planning principles.

NZPI'S PREFERRED APPROACH

Leadership

- Encouraging the government to develop a national planning framework that provides a strategic context for policy and guide decision-making;

Education, research and innovation

- Maintaining a good awareness of climate change planning systems in other jurisdictions in order inform its own policies and to keep up to date with international best practice approaches;
- Advocating for collection of reliable and locally meaningful climate change data and forecasting that can inform policy development;
- Keeping in contact with members and institutions involved in researching climate change issues and their effects, and in implementing policies to adapt to and to mitigate climate change effects.

The role of NZPI

- Promote climate change planning in its communications, policy advocacy, educational standards, professional development activities, and its work with other professions.
- Make developing and deepening partnerships with other professional organizations a priority in its approach to climate change planning.
- Ensure that practicing planners have access to the resources, data, training, and other support they need to fully integrate a climate-change lens into their work.
- Advocate for international and federal policies and actions that contribute to more robust climate change planning.
- Consider additional implementation priorities, based on an annual environmental scan and membership survey.

The professional role of planners

- Act in the public interest, incorporating measures to mitigate climate change and adapt to its impacts in all relevant planning decisions.
- Champion climate change solutions that counteract, rather than exacerbate, impacts on vulnerable groups and under-resourced areas.
- Be familiar with federal emissions reduction targets and frameworks, as well as provincial/territorial, regional, and/or local targets where they exist, and advance policies and regulations that work towards achieving those objectives.
- Know the climate and hazard projections for their regions and make decisions accordingly.
- Account for increased disruption and unpredictability by incorporating flexibility and redundancy into their plans.
- Plan for worst-case scenarios and incorporate risk-reduction measures into their plans, in line with the precautionary principle or “no-regrets” approach to decision-making.
- Base planning advice on authoritative climate and energy data and projections.
- Use established metrics and approaches to data collection, wherever possible, to facilitate sharing data with other communities.
- Model environmentally responsible decision-making in their professional practices.
- Ensure maximum transparency of the decision-making process to improve community engagement and accountability.

Ends