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SUBMISSION ON DRAFT SUSTAINABLE ENERGY POLICY 2010-2020

I make the following submission in my capacity as a private citizen of the ACT.

Introduction

The Chief Minister is absolutely right when he says, in the Introduction to the draft sustainable energy policy ‘The manner in which Canberrans respond to the challenge of climate change will be the defining legacy of this generation’ and ‘the way we produce and consume energy is unsustainable’.

I welcome the ACT government’s commitment to the ACT achieving zero net greenhouse gas emissions by 2060. This is a very important target that must be met, preferably before 2060, if we are to take responsibility for our actions that contribute to climate change. The only way that this target will be met is if:

- we have an ‘energy descent’ plan or roadmap outlining milestones for moving the ACT from current levels of emissions to zero emissions by 2060
- specific target dates are set for delivery of key elements of the energy descent plan
- the target and energy descent plan are understood and owned by the entire Canberra community and endorsed by all three major parties in the ACT parliament; this is vital, as we need to work together on this long haul.

I encourage the ACT government to work with the other parties and grass-roots, non-government and government organisations as well as the broader ACT community society to this end.

Broad comments

The energy descent plan and Sustainable Energy Policy 2010-2020 need to be part of a clearly articulated vision of the kind of society into which we seek to transform the ACT community. By our centenary in 2013, Canberra carbon emissions should have peaked and be beginning to decline and the energy descent plan should be an integral part of Canberra’s life.

The ten Outcomes in the Draft Sustainable Energy Policy are a good start to this work.

However, the proposed actions need to provide a stronger basis for the ACT achieving energy sustainability and greenhouse gas neutrality by 2060. These actions should be actual actions that will affect the sustainability of energy used in the ACT – not just ‘consider’ taking actions.

The actions need to include early work over the next 2-3 years:

- to ensure that the ACT’s emissions peak no later than 2013
- on the value and behavioural transitions that will be required to make Canberra a resilient and sustainable city
- dealing with issues relating to population growth and geography of the Territory and Canberra in particular
- to identify who will be responsible for doing what and how progress will be judged.

They need to include:

- milestones for achieving this work (i.e. to 2013), as well as longer term milestones – not just some milestones for 2020 compared with Business As Usual (set when???)
- a renewable energy target of at least 100% by 2060

Specific actions to be included in the Policy

In addition to the above, the Sustainable Energy Policy needs to include:

1. actions to enhance the uptake of renewable energy within the Territory (needed for energy security reasons as well), such as:
 - (a) retaining the existing rates of payment of the Feed-In-Tariff
 - (b) amending the legislation to encourage participation of renewable generators with a capacity in excess of 30 kW
 - (c) amending the legislation to make the Fee-In-Tariff available to groups and people not occupying the premises where the generator is installed (for example enabling people who can afford to install a generator but cannot do so on their own dwelling to rent roofspace for the purpose of generation)
2. links to better urban planning and regulation, including
 - (a) ramping up of new building requirements such that they are to achieve at least the European energy efficiency requirements
 - (i) if we were to exceed them, ACT could become a centre of excellence, which would improve the robustness of our economy
 - (b) changing the various energy rating schemes (particularly for buildings) to take account of the finishes and landscaping, and reward good ratings/penalise poor ratings financially (eg via higher fees for bad performance) or regulation (eg banning dark coloured roofs, requiring better building standards), for example, on:
 - (i) black or dark-coloured buildings and cars require greater cooling in summer, the peak of electricity consumption

- (ii) buildings that leak and/or have low thermal mass perform poorly in energy efficiency terms in our climate, as well as being uncomfortable and expensive for occupiers
 - (iii) dark-coloured paving and poor location of trees and shade structures can increase energy used in the building whereas good landscaping can dramatically reduce the energy used
- 3. actions to improve the energy use behaviour of low income earners and renters and the efficiency of dwellings that they occupy; this will also have the benefit of improving the comfort of those occupiers as well as reducing the ongoing expense burden associated with their energy use
- 4. more effective actions to reduce energy used for transport
 - (a) This should include greater encouragement for people to walk and cycle, and this will require better urban and transport planning, policies and rules.
 - (b) To reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 60% of 2000 levels by 2050 with a milestone of limiting 2025 emissions to 2000 levels will require emissions to be reduced by about 33% over the same time. This equates to reducing emissions by about half compared with BAU.
 - (c) The Sustainable Transport Plan will need to be substantially improved from the draft released last year to deliver its share of the reductions, as outlined in the submission from SEE-Change (Inner South) on the draft Sustainable Transport Plan
 - (d) Other actions that will reduce transport energy include:
 - (i) encouraging more locally-grown food; this would also have the benefits of improved food security and could also link with urban forest improvements
 - (ii) encourage tree material that is unsuitable for re-use as timber and is mulched to be used on site or close by. This could be done in conjunction with a program that encourages mulched and vegetated nature strips instead of lawns. This would reduce greenhouse gases associated with mowing and carting tree prunings/mulch as well as reduce the detrimental impact to trees and visual amenity of parking on nature strips and improve water infiltration to sustain trees.
- 5. innovative ways of reducing and/or re-using waste, for example:
 - (a) encouraging local re-use of organic waste eg via biogas co-energy production or neighbourhood composting
- 6. links to the urban forest strategy, for example:
 - (a) Trees play a very important role in providing a canopy that helps to reduce the heat island effect, and thus reduce the reliance on other forms of cooling such as airconditioners
 - (b) It is also vital that trees that are planted are appropriate for the situation and not remove desirable solar access to buildings (particularly neighbouring ones) eg by providing year-round shade. Buildings with good solar access may be able to be heated passively in winter and used to generate electricity using solar energy, reducing Canberra's reliance on external sources of electricity and fossil fuels. Easily accessible and well-known information should be provided to help private occupiers choose trees appropriately.

As Mr Stanhope and others have said, 'The cost of inaction is too great.'

I am happy to discuss these comments further, drawing on a long history dealing with climate change and related energy policy, and my links with several local community organisations.

Gillian King