

'Exhausted' councils sign joint plea for urgent federal help to cover disaster clean-up costs

ABC Illawarra / By Jessica Clifford

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Fire damaged road signs from the Currowan bushfire in the Shoalhaven. (ABC Illawarra: Tim Fernandez)

Mayors and councillors from disaster-affected regions of New South Wales and Queensland fear the cost of cleaning up after frequent natural disasters is not financially sustainable and are seeking urgent Federal Government help.

Seventeen local council representatives signed a joint statement released today, calling on the Morrison Government to recognise the spiralling impacts of natural disasters caused by climate change and to do more to protect communities from the fallout.

The statement also calls for less reliance on fossil fuels and more investment in clean industries that create regional jobs.

Shoalhaven Mayor Amanda Findley, one of the signatories, said her region had been hit particularly hard by fires, storms and floods.

Key points:

- A joint statement by 17 mayors and councillors from NSW and QLD calls for urgent Federal Government action to protect communities
- Councillors say they are exhausted and clean-up costs from events such as bushfires and floods are crippling
- The statement calls for less reliance on fossil fuels and more investment in clean industries that create regional jobs

She said while the council had covered much of the clean-up for these natural events, it had come at a cost.

"The burden on the ratepayer becomes enormous," Cr Findley said.

"Things like roads, curbs and guttering are the things that really suffer under wet weather conditions like what we've seen this summer.

"Things that don't give government a ribbon to cut but are really valued by people every day."



Shoalhaven Mayor Amanda Findley is one of the signatories to the joint statement. (ABC Illawarra: Sarah Moss)

Councils 'don't have the cashflow'

Lismore councillor Elly Bird said her region in north-eastern NSW was one of the most flood prone in the country.

She said the Lismore City Council needed funding to help individuals increase their preparedness for such events rather than only focussing on the clean-up.

"We need funding to help people lift their properties for example," Cr Bird said.

"In regional areas, councils don't have the cashflow for these events. It costs us millions of dollars."



Lismore was hit by severe flooding in 2017 and is still recovering from the impacts. (ABC News: Ruby Cornish)

The joint statement by Australian mayors and councillors shows these concerns are reflected across NSW and QLD.

The statement says in part:

We are exhausted by the immediate costs and challenges, and we are worried about what's to come. Extreme weather disasters used to occur every few years. Now, we are facing them every few months.

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Climate change disasters 'to get worse'

The joint statement also calls on the Federal Government to address climate change, which Climate Council researcher Dr Simon Bradshaw said was influencing natural disasters.

"All types of extreme weather events including storms, coastal erosion, flooding, bushfires, heatwaves and drought, are influenced by climate change," he said.

"And it's going to get worse — by 2038, the price tag of climate impacts could climb to \$100 billion a year."

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The statement signed by the 17 mayors and councillors says:

We need more support from the Federal Government to further reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, and invest in clean industries that create regional jobs, unlock business investment and spur technological innovation.

Deputy Mayor of MidCoast Council Claire Pontin said governments were not doing enough in relation to climate change.

"The overall issue is being downplayed and ignored by both levels of government," Cr Pontin said.

"Every time we have to deal with a climate emergency, it just pulls money out of the standard maintenance fund.

"We're expected constantly to do more, by and large, without extra funding."

The joint statement will be presented to the Federal Government with all seventeen signatures today.

The signatories are from the following NSW councils: Bega Valley Shire Council, Bellingen Shire Council, Byron Shire Council, Dungog Shire Council, Eurobodalla Shire Council, Kiama Municipal Council, Lismore City Council, MidCoast Council, Parkes Shire Council, Shellharbour City Council, Shoalhaven City Council, Tweed Shire Council, City of Wagga Wagga, Wingecarribee Shire Council, Wollongong City Council.

And from Douglas Shire Council and Noosa Shire Council in Queensland.

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