



Name: Uniting NSW.ACT

Submission date: 6/06/2025

1. Reduce the cost of meeting carbon targets

1. What could be done to improve the cost-effectiveness and alignment of policies to reduce emissions across the industrial, electricity and transport sectors?

The participant did not respond to this question.

2. Are there gaps in the emissions-reduction policies in the industrial, electricity and transport sectors which should be addressed?

The participant did not respond to this question.

3. Are there any duplicative emissions-reduction policies in the industrial, electricity and transport sectors which could be streamlined?

The participant did not respond to this question.

2. Speed up approvals for new energy infrastructure

1. Are planning and approvals processes for large energy infrastructure taking too long? If so, what causes the most delay?

The participant did not respond to this question.

2. How can planning and approvals processes be sped up without unduly compromising regulatory standards?

The participant did not respond to this question.

3. Should clean energy projects be treated differently to other projects for the purpose of environmental and other approvals? If so, how?

The participant did not respond to this question.

4. What can be done to build local community support for new energy infrastructure projects?

The participant did not respond to this question.

5. Please outline any evidence showing the productivity benefits of faster approvals for energy projects.

The participant did not respond to this question.

3. Encourage adaptation by addressing barriers to private investment

1. What are the barriers and enablers impacting decisions by owner-occupiers, landlords and developers about how housing is built and updated over time so that it is resilient to the effects of climate change?

Uniting NSW.ACT is the community services and advocacy arm of the Uniting Church Synod of NSW & ACT. Uniting NSW.ACT is one of the largest community service

providers in NSW and ACT with over 14,000 employees, supporting over 145,000 clients across the life course. Uniting NSW.ACT is active in advocating for climate action as we recognise the significant and worsening risks these climate impacts pose to our communities. The people that Uniting serves are particularly vulnerable to a range of challenges, including the harmful impacts of climate change. A key aspect of disadvantage is their access to climate resilient and affordable housing.

Uniting NSW.ACT is making steps to reduce our own carbon footprint, with a net zero carbon target set for 2040. Between 2010 and 2023, we reduced our carbon emissions by 25.4%, implementing efficiency projects and utilising our 13,000+ solar panels to generate renewable energy for aged care services and early learning centres across NSW and ACT. Uniting is already one of the largest renewable energy generators in the aged care sector.

Our submission draws on two interests of Uniting NSW.ACT:

1. Internal sustainability experience: Uniting NSW.ACT has committed to an internal carbon neutrality plan, which involves upgrading our properties with energy efficiency and solar and batteries. We have practical experience of the challenges in building and upgrading properties to be climate resilient.
2. Advocacy perspective: Uniting NSW.ACT are strong advocates for policies and programs that would support disadvantaged members of the community be better able to withstand the effects of climate change including upgrading their homes to be climate resilient.

Internal sustainability experience:

Barriers

- Lack of funding and resources: Uniting NSW.ACT operates accommodations and residents for many cohorts of clients. Upgrading properties to make them more climate resilient is resource intensive. As a community service agency, we have responsibility to be mindful of our expenditure. Currently there is limited government support for community services to upgrade their facilities.
- Lack of uniform standards as a barrier: There are various performance standards, such as NABERS, BASIX, Embodied Carbon and it is hard to make decisions about what is best practise to apply in our context.
- Uniting NSW.ACT has more scale and resources than most, so we are able to engage experts to assist us in making decisions. However, that is not the usual experience for the rest of the community service sector.

Enablers

- Strong commitment to climate action from the Uniting Church: Ever since the founding of the Uniting Church in 1977, the church has had a commitment to the well-being of the environment and careful stewardship of the Earth's resources for the common good. In 2019, the Uniting Church NSW.ACT Synod passed a resolution that called for a Synod-wide strategy cut emissions and advocate for climate action. This gave Uniting NSW.ACT a mandate to commit to a carbon neutrality plan, as it aligns with our purpose

and mission.

- Building and running properties: Uniting NSW.ACT is incentivised to build and operate buildings in a cost-effective and climate resilient way because we are responsible for these buildings for 30+ years. We have a long view of these properties and ensure they are resilient for the future. This is a different situation from the usual case of property developers incentivised to keep building costs down, while owners are incentivised to keep operating costs down.

Advocacy perspective:

Cost as a barrier

- Climate change is making extreme weather events (like heatwaves, cold, storms) longer, more frequent and more severe. This means being able to make homes comfortable with appliances like aircon or heating during these days of extremes will be more costly.
- Often people with less means can only afford to rent poorer quality housing, which is more exposed to extremes in weather and temperature.
- People without means are less able to access solutions that could drive down costs, like rooftop solar and batteries, and household thermal upgrades. If we do not act, low-income households will be left behind in the shift to clean energy.

Uniting NSW. ACT is advocating for a government program that will:

- Cut power bills now: With an urgent \$5bn investment to deliver immediate subsidies and finance to reduce or eliminate the upfront cost of household energy upgrades, rooftop solar and batteries for millions of Australian households hit hardest by the cost of living crisis.
- Invest in our all-electric and efficient future: With a minimum of \$50bn over 10 years to repower Australian households and communities with rooftop solar, batteries, electric appliances and thermal improvements to help cut energy bills and reduce climate pollution for everyone.

Split incentives as a barrier

- Renters do not have authority and control to make major upgrades to their properties. Renters are reluctant to ask landlords for these upgrades due to threat of eviction or potential rent increases that are already increasingly unaffordable in many major cities.
- Landlords do not get the direct financial benefit of cost-savings, so do not have an incentive to do this. There is also no requirement to make these upgrades under tenancy laws and regulations in NSW.

Disasters as a threat multiplier

- In February 2022, the first of two major floods devastated communities in the Northern Rivers region. As a result of the disaster, five people lost their lives, 6,000 properties were damaged or destroyed, some 10,000 people were made homeless, and more than 31,000 were directly affected. In the immediate aftermath, 8000 people sought refuge in 80 pop-up evacuation centres hastily set up.
- In this context, Uniting's Recovery Support Services team were supporting the disaster-

affected community to access services they needed. Community members, who before the floods were already experiencing disadvantage, such as long-term homelessness, boarding in temporary accommodation or escaping domestic and family violence, were all presenting to disaster response services that were not set up to deal with these complex cases.

- Three years after the floods, these housing challenges have not been resolved. This has led to maladaptive practices for people to seek shelter, like people resorting to squatting in vacant, damaged homes, or still residing in 'temporary' accommodation 3 years later, without a permanent solution.

- When thinking of climate resilient housing, there needs to be consideration of the worsening severity of natural disasters due to ongoing global warming.

2. What information do people need to make decisions about where to live, how to build and how to upgrade their homes to appropriately factor in climate change?

Internal sustainability experience:

- Access to trusted sources of information on climate risks relevant to a local area: Uniting NSW.ACT is responsive to the climate risks, including avoiding building in flood-prone areas and having site-specific adaptation plans. We are able to do so by relying on information provided by local and state government about flood and bushfire risks.

Advocacy perspective:

Information support and advice needed

- While there is information available, this isn't accessible to everyone in the community. People experiencing marginalisation and disadvantage need tailored support and education to understand the climate risks. They also need specific outreach programs to help them navigate government supports to upgrade their homes to be more climate resilient.

- Uniting NSW.ACT advocates with partners for the government to invest in engagement and outreach programs like Mobile Community Energy Hub. This Hub would connect culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Western Sydney to energy experts independent from energy companies, to receive information they can trust, in their own language.

Role for community services in linking community

- Uniting NSW.ACT believes that community service organisations can play a key role in linking communities with these government programs.

- Uniting is already running internal training and education. The Uniting for Climate Justice Plan was created focusing on building capacity and providing resources for staff to respond more effectively to and support people facing climate-related threats. Initiatives as part of this plan include online events held in collaboration with our Uniting Staff Climate Taskforce such as 'Tackling cost of living and climate change: win-win solutions for all training' workshop; 'Sustainable Summer savings: how to beat the heat and your energy bills' webinar, and 'Uniting's Climate Challenge and Actions for Change: stories from the frontline' webinar. More resources and training can be made to community service agencies to upskill their frontline staff on about these matters.

3. What are the most cost-effective retrofitting options for improving the resilience of Australia's existing housing stock? What are their costs and benefits?

Internal sustainability experience:

Uniting NSW.ACT is undertaking retrofits to upgrade 50% of our community housing portfolio. The key retrofitting options we implement are reverse-cycle air conditioning, solar panels and hot-water heat pump. We estimate that this will reduce energy bills for tenants by 50%. Additionally, these upgrades are less complex to install, so can be done quickly.

4. What role might minimum standards play in ensuring the resilience of Australia's housing stock?

Internal sustainability perspective:

- Minimum standards help organisations make decisions about priorities: While Uniting NSW.ACT has a commitment to sustainability and has set our own target of carbon neutrality by 2040, government regulations and minimum standards incentivises organisations to make decisions about which changes are implemented first. For example, in anticipation of the NSW government's Food Organics and Garden Organics (FOGO) recycling mandate, Uniting has prioritised developing and implementing food recycling systems and processes at our sites.

- Uniting NSW.ACT's Uniting Design Guide: This guide assists us to take into account climate resilience in our upgrade and building decisions, including maximising PV capacity on the roofs; including EV charging spaces; no gas on future sites; aiming for high NatHERS star rating; and including of ceiling fans and double-glazed system for all future buildings.

Advocacy perspective:

Minimum standards as a solution for renters

- Uniting NSW. ACT calls for the government to ensure that any investment into upgrading households is tied to conditionalities and enablers to support:
- Mandatory minimum energy standards for rentals, coupled with renter protections
- Mandatory disclosure of energy performance
- Mandated minimum energy performance for appliances.

5. The impacts of climate change are being factored into the regulation of where and how houses are built in different ways around Australia. What does leading practice look like? Where is there room for improvement? Are there lessons we can learn from other countries?

The participant did not respond to this question.