

# Extreme heat and humidity in summer 2025-2026

August 2025

## Net Zero Commission

29 August 2025

**The Hon Penny Sharpe MLC  
Minister for Climate Change, Minister for Energy,  
Minister for the Environment and Minister for Heritage  
52 Martin Place  
Sydney NSW 2000**

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Re: Risk of extreme heat and humidity in summer 2025-2026

Dear Minister,

As the extreme heat events being experienced in the Northern Hemisphere this summer continue, we are writing to alert you to the very real risk that NSW faces of extreme heat and humidity events occurring over the coming 2025-26 summer and beyond. We make some priority recommendations for your consideration for action to help mitigate such impacts.

As you know, under the *Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Act 2023*, the Net Zero Commission is responsible for monitoring and reviewing progress towards the adaptation objective and for providing advice and recommendations on progress. Accordingly, we believe it is important that appropriate action is in hand to manage the impacts of extreme heat and humidity, proportionate to the severity of the escalating risk, and the evidence of the unequal ways in which these impacts are being realised. In bringing these matters to your attention now, the commission is informed by the Act's guiding principles, which include the principle of taking action as early as possible to minimise the cost and adverse impacts of climate change.

The commission notes that following the launch of Western Sydney Region of Councils' *Greater Sydney Heat Smart City Plan* (Heat Plan) last year — alongside the release of the updated *State Heatwave Sub Plan*, *State Disaster Mitigation Plan*, and *NSW Climate Change*

*Adaptation Action Plan 2025–2029* – the NSW Government has taken significant steps to further define its role in responding to the risks of extreme heat and humidity.

The commission further notes there is a commitment to review and update the adaptation action plan in 2026, which provides an opportunity for additional responses to manage climate change impacts. The Disaster Adaptation Plan Guidelines released in August 2025 also present an opportunity for further place-based action.

However, our assessment of existing responses to manage the risks of extreme heat and humidity events has identified that these efforts to prepare and respond to extreme heat and humidity events will require additional steps to ensure that preparations for the coming summer are commensurate to the likelihood and severity of the risk now posed. The current adaptation action plan contains limited actions that directly seek to address community health risks. Responses need to evolve to account for the increasing impact climate change is having on chronic and acute health risks.

Weather patterns associated with heat and humidity, creating prolonged periods of extreme high temperatures, pose a significant health risk because they hinder a body's ability to cool itself. Climate change is bringing ever increasing temperatures, leading to more intense and frequent extreme heat events, including both heatwaves and periods of chronic high heat and humidity. Associated with these events, as has been experienced on a widespread scale in the recent Northern Hemisphere summer, NSW can expect increased deaths, acute and chronic health issues, mental health impacts and incidences of domestic violence<sup>1,2</sup>.

The commission fully supports the collaborative approach taken to deliver the Heat Plan, which brought together local councils, government agencies and departments, business, industry and communities to establish a coordinated approach to managing extreme heat and clarifying shared responsibilities for the Greater Sydney region. We recognise that full implementation of the Heat Plan could take years. However, the commission believes further NSW Government action is warranted to ensure key elements of the Heat Plan are quickly implemented to safeguard impacted communities.

We acknowledge that numerous ministerial portfolios have an inherent role to play in managing climate risks including rising temperatures, and we will look to provide this letter and its recommendations to relevant ministers for consideration.

**The commission is recommending actions in two categories** - the first for implementation before the coming 2025-26 summer, the second, for longer term action over the next year.

1 Ebi et al. (2021) Hot weather and heat extremes: health risks. *The Lancet*, Volume 398, Issue 10301, 698 – 708.

2 Stevens et al. (2023). No retreat from the heat: temperature-related risk of violent assault is increased by being inside. *International Journal of Urban Sciences*, 28(1), 124–139. <https://doi.org/10.1080/12265934.2023.2209544>.

**Recommendation 1:** In preparation for the coming 2025 Summer, the NSW Government implement specific strategies to manage increasing risks of extreme heat and humidity events.

The Heatwave Subplan, updated in 2024, established a new leadership role for Ambulance NSW as the lead response agency. However, it does not establish additional roles or strategies to meet the growing need for sustained heatwave adaptation and mitigation.

To support existing emergency efforts to respond to extreme heat and humidity events, the commission recommends NSW Government action to:

1. **Identify** currently available Cool Places across the state (accessible venues where community members can seek respite from the heat, distinct from more formal Cool Centres or emergency Evacuation Centres) and **deliver recommendation 30 of the Heat Plan to test and evaluate community Cool Centres for the 2025/26 summer season in Greater Sydney**. For subsequent summers, this would inform future efforts to expand the initiative in collaboration with councils and across other local government areas.
2. **Communicate** to the NSW public NSW hospital protocols for managing heat-related presentations to accelerate treatment for those at risk and to help manage impacts on our hospital system during an emergency.
3. **Strengthen** extreme heat related communications to build community understanding of, and capability to reduce, their own extreme heat and humidity risks to the level of understanding that has been achieved for bushfire or flood hazards. This could include active educational campaigns extending the Beat the Heat communication resources, inclusion of extreme heat and humidity as a hazard in the Hazards Near Me App, and funding support for the Red Cross's TeleCross REDi service which will help ensure the safety of elderly and vulnerable community members.

**Recommendation 2:** The NSW Government take a leadership role in implementation and governance of the Heat Plan, establishing clear governance for adapting to the increasing frequency and severity of extreme heat and humidity events and over the next 12 months:

1. **Identify** a governance framework to coordinate efforts to respond to increasing extreme heat and humidity events and ensure roles have been established, with identified Ministerial responsibility across the adaptation, prevention, preparedness, response and recovery cycles, covering chronic heat risks and extending beyond the medical emergency response to heatwaves.
2. **Take a joint leadership role** in coordinating governance for the Heat Plan. This could be done as part of broader multi-hazard disaster planning (Recommendation 1 in the Heat Plan), through incorporation of the Heat Plan

actions into a Disaster Adaptation Plan for Greater Sydney, or another mechanism.

3. **Clarify** its commitment to delivering on selected actions in the Heat Plan with modifications as required to align with government priorities and/or to expand action to a whole of state level. Efforts to extend recommendations across the state should maintain applicability to place-based implementation.
4. **Deliver** an implementation plan for recommended government actions in the Heat Plan particularly for actions that are not a part of existing NSW Government programs.
5. **Identify and increase** funding sources available to deliver on new actions.

As part of our functions in respect of adaptation, the commission is exploring adaptation to extreme heat and humidity across NSW which will be the subject of a future report. This report will provide more in-depth assessment in respect of the Heat Plan, implementation challenges, and provide a broader assessment of heat and humidity risks to NSW communities, environment, infrastructure and economy and the initiatives in place to manage and mitigate them.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters in more detail.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Meg McDonald". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**Meg McDonald**  
Interim Chair  
Net Zero Commission