

Gas-free new homes and businesses for Lake Mac

Problem, Platform, Solution

1. Problem (World-as-it-is)

Lake Macquarie's greenhouse gas emissions are **not falling fast enough** to meet the city's own targets. Despite some progress, emissions have **flatlined**, with only a **0.2% per-capita reduction in 2023/24**, far short of the required **3% per year**. The document notes that "*total emissions actually increased slightly by 0.5% in 2023/24*" and that the city is **unlikely to reach its 2027 target** of a 57% per-capita reduction.

Gas use is a key contributor:

- Residential and commercial gas emissions have remained **static**, even though industrial gas use has declined.
- Methane is a powerful, fast-acting greenhouse gas — "*responsible for roughly 30% of global warming*" and "*breaks down in the atmosphere in about a decade*," meaning reductions have **immediate climate benefits**.

New development is locking in **decades of future gas demand**, worsening emissions, household costs, and indoor air pollution.

2. Platform (World-as-it-should-be)

A Lake Macquarie where **all new homes and businesses are built all-electric**, protecting health, lowering bills, and aligning with climate commitments.

The document frames this ideal future clearly:

- "*The easiest emissions to deal with are the ones we never create.*"
- Councils can "*drive new sustainable development through model Development Control Plans.*"
- All-electric buildings avoid unnecessary gas infrastructure, reduce indoor air pollution, and deliver lower running costs.

In this preferred future:

- New developments are **gas-free by default**.
 - Community health improves through reduced exposure to NO₂ and other pollutants.
 - Households and businesses save money — the NSW Government estimates **\$2,771 per year** in savings, or **\$4,000 with solar**.
 - The city's growth aligns with its climate strategy and net-zero trajectory.
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3. Solution (What must be done)

The document proposes a clear, actionable solution:

Update Lake Macquarie's Development Control Plan (DCP)

Council should amend its DCP to **discourage or prevent gas connections in all new developments on health and economic grounds**.

The document states:

- *"NSW councils can require all-electric, gas-free new buildings via their planning schemes without waiting for state government approval."*
- *"DCPs... act as a discouragement on gas connections and appliances in new builds."*
- Other councils — Newcastle, Lane Cove, Parramatta, Inner West, City of Sydney — have already done this.

The recommended action is explicit:

"Lake Macquarie City should amend its planning rules to discourage gas connections and gas appliances in all new developments for health, and economic reasons."

This is framed as a **low-cost, high-impact** climate action that Council can take immediately.

Call to Action

Lake Macquarie has a real opportunity right now to protect community health, cut energy bills, and prevent avoidable emissions — simply by ensuring new homes and businesses are built all-electric from the start. The evidence is overwhelming: gas is a major driver of climate pollution, it worsens indoor air quality, and it's more expensive than efficient electric alternatives. As the document below notes, *"the best way to reduce community emissions is*

to avoid creating them in the first place” and banning gas in new developments is one of the simplest, lowest-cost ways to do exactly that.

Lake Macquarie City Council can act immediately by updating its Development Control Plan to discourage new gas connections on **health** and **economic** grounds — just as other NSW councils have already done. This doesn't require state approval. It only requires leadership.

Now is the moment for Lake Mac to step up.

Let's call on councillors to:

- Support amendments to the DCP that require all-electric new developments
- Prioritise community health by reducing exposure to indoor air pollutants from gas
- Lower household and business energy costs by avoiding unnecessary gas infrastructure
- Ensure the city's growth aligns with its climate commitments and community expectations

Tell Lake Macquarie City Council: it's time to go gas-free for all new homes and businesses.

Every new development built today will shape our city for decades. Let's make sure those decades are cleaner, healthier and more affordable for everyone.

Why Lake Macquarie Must Act Now to Deliver Gas-Free, All-Electric New Development

The Need for Rapid Emissions Reduction

The amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere keeps on going up and up from the burning of fossil fuels – principally coal, oil and gas. Australia has set a legislated target to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. To help drive the transition to net zero, the Australian Government has set a target to reduce emissions to 62-70% below 2005 levels by 2035.¹

The Role of Local Councils in Driving Net Zero

Councils are uniquely positioned to help the drive towards net zero emissions through their connection to local communities, and their existing mandate to provide support and infrastructure to residents and businesses. Councils can drive new sustainable development through model Development Control Plans, and support community initiatives towards

¹ Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. (2025). Net Zero. Retrieved 10 June 2026, from <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/climate-change/emissions-reduction/net-zero>

reducing emissions. Councils are well-placed to coordinate efforts between residents, businesses, and workers within their LGA to move towards reducing emissions².

Lake Macquarie's Current Emissions Profile

Lake Macquarie City's Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan 2020-2027 details the planning management action to *"Investigate and implement energy efficiency and emissions reduction measures, and renewable energy opportunities, across the City for public, commercial and residential Developments."* Furthermore, it states that Lake Macquarie City has a 2027 target of a *"57% reduction in City-wide per capita greenhouse gas emissions from 2007 baseline"*³.

In the baseline year, city-wide total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions were estimated to be 4,869,761 t CO₂-e and a city population of 194,997⁴ (25.0 t CO₂-e per capita). By 2023/24, total GHG emissions had reduced to an estimated 3,592,200 t CO₂-e with a population that had grown to 218,965 (16.4 t CO₂-e per capita), a per capita reduction of only 34.3% from the baseline. It is expected that the 57% target by 2027 will not be reached.

Lake Macquarie City's Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction Targets Policy specifies a 3% per annum reduction in greenhouse gases from the City's emissions (measured on a per capita basis)⁵. However, Greenhouse gas emissions in the Lake Macquarie LGA have flatlined over the past two years, with only an approximate 0.2% per capita reduction in 2023/24.⁶

² Department of Planning, Industry and Environment. (2020), Net Zero Emissions Guidance for NSW Councils. Helping councils plan for a low emissions future. Retrieved 10 June 2026, from https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-08/2020_05_NSW_NetZero_EmissionGuidance.pdf

³ Lake Macquarie City Council. (2020) Together Lake Mac, Our Plan for a Sustainable City, Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan 2020-2027. Retrieved 15 June 2026, from <https://www.lakemac.com.au/files/assets/public/hptrim/project-management-environmental-management-projects-pm180003-2018-review-environmental-sustainability-policy-and-2014-2023-environmental-sustainability-action-plan/pm180003-public-exhibition-environmental-sustainability-strategy-and-action-plan-2020-2027/final-low-resolution-environmental-sustainability-strategy-and-action-plan-2020-2027-ratified-at-22-june-2020-council-meeting.pdf>

⁴ Lake Macquarie City Council. (2012) Lake Macquarie Energy Resilience Strategic Plan. Retrieved 15 June 2026, from <https://www.lakemac.com.au/files/assets/public/hptrim/environmental-management-program-s-climate-change-energy-resilience-plan/lake-macquarie-energy-resilience-strategic-plan-final-july-2012.pdf>

⁵ Lake Macquarie City. (2020). Council Policy. Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction Targets. 30 November 2020. Version 4. Retrieved 15 June 2026, from <https://www.lakemac.com.au/files/assets/public/v/3/hptrim/environmental-management-policy-protection-of-the-environment-policies-pep-greenhouse-gas-emission-reduction-targets/greenhouse-gas-emission-reduction-targets-council-policy-version-4.pdf>

⁶ Ironbark Sustainability and Beyond Zero Emissions. (2026). 2025 Snapshot emissions profile – Ironbark Sustainability and Beyond Zero Emissions. Snapshot. Retrieved 10 June 2026, from <https://snapshotclimate.com.au/>

Total emissions actually increased slightly by 0.5% in 2023/24, with emission levels across most sectors remaining static.

Whereas methane (gas) use has been decreasing for Industrial uses in the Lake Macquarie LGA (28% decrease over the past 5 years, with a 18% decrease in 2023/2024), its use in Residential and Commercial sectors has remained relatively static. Figure 1 details gas emissions from 2021/22 to 2023/24 in the Residential, Commercial and Industrial sectors.

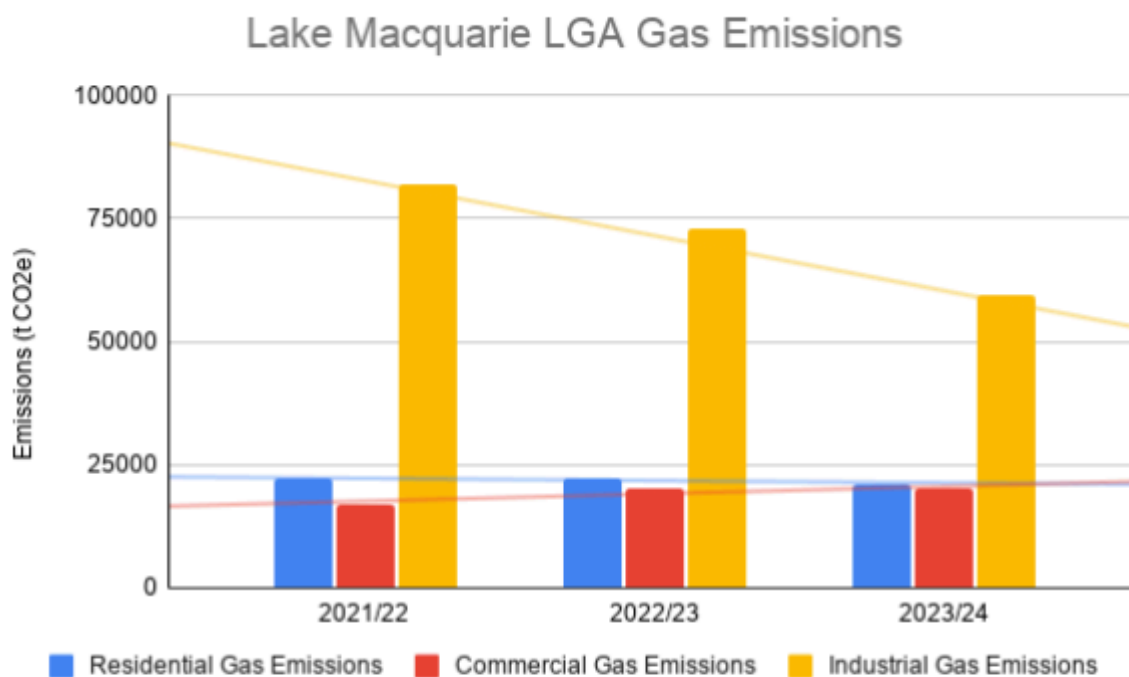


Figure 1. Lake Macquarie LGA Gas Emissions (Ironbark Sustainability and Beyond Zero Emissions, 2026)

Why Reducing Gas Use in New Developments Matters

Methane packs a serious punch when it comes to heating the planet — it's responsible for roughly 30% of global warming, and over a 100-year period it traps about 28 times more heat than carbon dioxide.⁷ But here's the part that really changes the game: methane doesn't stick around for long. It breaks down in the atmosphere in about a decade.

That means when we stop releasing methane, its warming effect drops off quickly. The impact is almost immediate.

⁷ NSW EPA. (2015). Methane. Retrieved 14 June 2026, from <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2564-methane-fact-sheet.pdf>

Because methane (gas) contributes so much and acts so fast, reducing it is one of the most powerful things we can do to slow warming in the near term. In terms of both speed and scale, nothing else comes close.⁸

The easiest emissions to deal with are the ones we never create. If we can stop certain sources of pollution without causing any real downsides, that's a win — and gas in new homes and businesses is a perfect example.

By choosing all-electric from the start, we avoid locking in decades of unnecessary gas use. It's a simple, low-cost way to cut future emissions before they even happen, and it doesn't require households or businesses to sacrifice comfort or performance.

How Councils Can Ban Gas in New Developments

A first step in decreasing gas use in the Residential and Commercial sectors is through the banning of gas from new developments.

All NSW councils have Development Control Plans (DCPs) which give them the legislative power to influence future development in their local government area.

350 Australia identified that councils in NSW have the power to ban gas from new developments via their planning systems. NSW councils can require all-electric, gas-free new buildings via their planning schemes without waiting for state government approval.⁹

NSW councils can require new developments be all-electric and gas-free by changing their Development Control Plans (DCPs). DCPs are planning instruments that guide development outcomes and operate like a performance assessment, in that DCPs incorporate a range of objectives that a development should satisfy. While it's true that not every provision within a DCP is in itself mandatory, including provisions that ban new gas connections, no individual provision of a performance assessment is mandatory.

DCPs can, and are, used by planning authorities like local councils, to influence development outcomes. DCPs that include clear and unambiguous provisions, like bans on new gas connections, act as a discouragement on gas connections and appliances in new builds, and make it much harder for developers to obtain planning approval for development applications if they are assessed as not complying with the broad and specific objectives of a DCP.

Numerous councils have already included all-electric provisions within DCPs to reduce the number of new gas connections in new developments, including City of Newcastle, Lane

⁸ Simon Clark. (2026, 13/06). The easiest climate change win ever. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=BWHfkkHmMJI>

⁹ 350 Australia. (n.d.), Detailed policy guide to all-electric, gas-free new homes and businesses. Retrieved 10 June 2026, from <https://350.org.au/detailed-policy-guide-to-all-electric-gas-free-new-homes-and-businesses/>

Cove Council, Parramatta Council, Waverley Council, Inner West, City of Sydney, and North Sydney Council from July 1st).¹⁰

Furthermore, DCPs do not require state government approval to be implemented - they just need a majority vote on council.

Navigating NSW Planning Restrictions

It should be noted that under the NSW State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP), councils are prevented from banning new gas connections if the purpose is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Nevertheless, the SEPP doesn't stop councils from finding other reasons to ban new connections and electrify buildings such as councils from banning gas from new development based on health or economic grounds.

The other state legislative requirement that councils must consider as part of the development approvals process is the BASIX sustainability rating tool. NSW's state planning policy requires that new developments be assessed against BASIX (Building Sustainability Index), which requires new builds to reach certain sustainability benchmarks around thermal performance, energy and water use, and greenhouse gas emissions. However, BASIX is effectively fuel agnostic, and neither bans or requires that new developments be connected to gas.

Health Impacts of Indoor Gas Use

Councils could reference the overwhelming peer-reviewed scientific evidence demonstrating the health risks associated with indoor gas use in their health justifications.

Nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) is released by use of gas for cooking and heating and is a potent respiratory irritant which can directly cause airway constriction and it can also cause sensitisation to allergens. In population studies it is associated with both the development of asthma and with asthma attacks. For a child with current asthma who lives in a home with a gas stove, 30% of their risk of asthma is from the stove. Australian researchers have estimated that across the community 12% of childhood asthma is attributable to the use of gas cooking stoves. It has also been found to increase the chance of being allergic to house dust mites in school children.¹¹

¹⁰ SwitchedOn. (2024). More local councils move to ban new gas connections. Retrieved 10 June 2026, from <https://switchedon.reneweconomy.com.au/content/more-local-councils-move-to-ban-new-gas-connections-in-homes-and-businesses>

¹¹ Doctors for the Environment. (2022). Asthma and indoor gas appliances. Retrieved 10 June 2026, from https://www.dea.org.au/asthma_and_indoor_gas_appliances_fact_sheet

Economic Benefits of All-Electric Buildings

Councils can also restrict new gas connections on the grounds that gas is more expensive than efficient electric alternatives. Operational cost savings to developers and occupants through the avoidance of gas installation, connection and ongoing connection and disconnection charges provide a means of justifying all electric buildings.¹²

Lane Cove Council calculated the total savings from not connecting gas to an apartment is in the order of \$2,000 per apartment. The NSW Government noted that Electric appliances generally cost less to run and maintain than gas and NSW houses and small businesses would save approximately \$2,771 per year (\$4000 with solar) and apartments \$2,400 per year by electrifying their homes and businesses.¹³

Case Study: Lane Cove Council's All-Electric DCP

An example is shown below for Lane Cove Council implementation of gas bans via DCP:

At its 21 September 2023 Council meeting, Lane Cove passed amendments to its Development Control Plan to include new rules that require new development be all-electric with no gas. It states:

"All new developments are to use only electricity for all energy requirements associated with normal operations. Where outdoor barbecues require gas then only bottled gas may be used."

The above rules apply to development applications above \$250,000 in value to ensure that minor applications are exempt. There is also an exemption for building uses that cannot electrify, which allows those uses to use fossil fuels for their operations. This will presumably apply to some industrial processes which cannot be electrified. The objectives of the above clause are to improve indoor and outdoor air quality (health) and to reduce energy costs to occupants (economic).

The key to drafting successful gas bans via DCP based on the Lane Cove model is the inclusion of the health and economic rationales which ensures that the anti-gas provisions of DCPs are compliant with the Sustainable Building SEPP and BASIX.

¹² Environmental Defenders Office. (2023) '350 Australia 'Electrify your Council'-Sustainable Buildings SEPP Guidance Note', 27 July 2023, Retrieved 10 June 2026, from https://350.org.au/files/2023/08/Summary-Legal-Advice_Environmental-Defenders-Office_DCPs-1.pdf

¹³ Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. (2026). Make the switch to electric. Learn about electrification and get started with our step-by-step guide. NSW Climate and Energy Action. Retrieved 11 June 2026, from <https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/households/upgrades/switch-electric>

Growth in Lake Macquarie and the Risk of Rising Gas Use

Lake Macquarie's population is growing steadily, adding about 2,143 people each year, or approximately 860 new houses each year.¹⁴ Without changes to planning laws this will lead to increased gas use within the LGA and its commensurate impact on health, economy and the environment of Lake Mac.

Why Gas-Free New Builds Are a Low-Cost Climate Solution

The best way to reduce community emissions is to avoid creating them in the first place. This means identifying activities that create emissions that could be stopped with no or minimal adverse impacts. Banning gas for new builds fits this criteria.

Changes to planning laws provide a major opportunity for councils to reduce their community emissions at little to no cost.

Recommendation: Update Lake Macquarie's DCP

Lake Macquarie City should amend its planning rules to discourage gas connections and gas appliances in all new developments for health, and economic reasons.

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¹⁴ Lake Macquarie City. (2026). Draft Housing Strategy. Retrieved 10 June 2026, from <https://shape.lakemac.com.au/housingstrategy>

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