



Moving beyond the plan: Exploring opportunities to accelerate the implementation of municipal climate adaptation policies and plans

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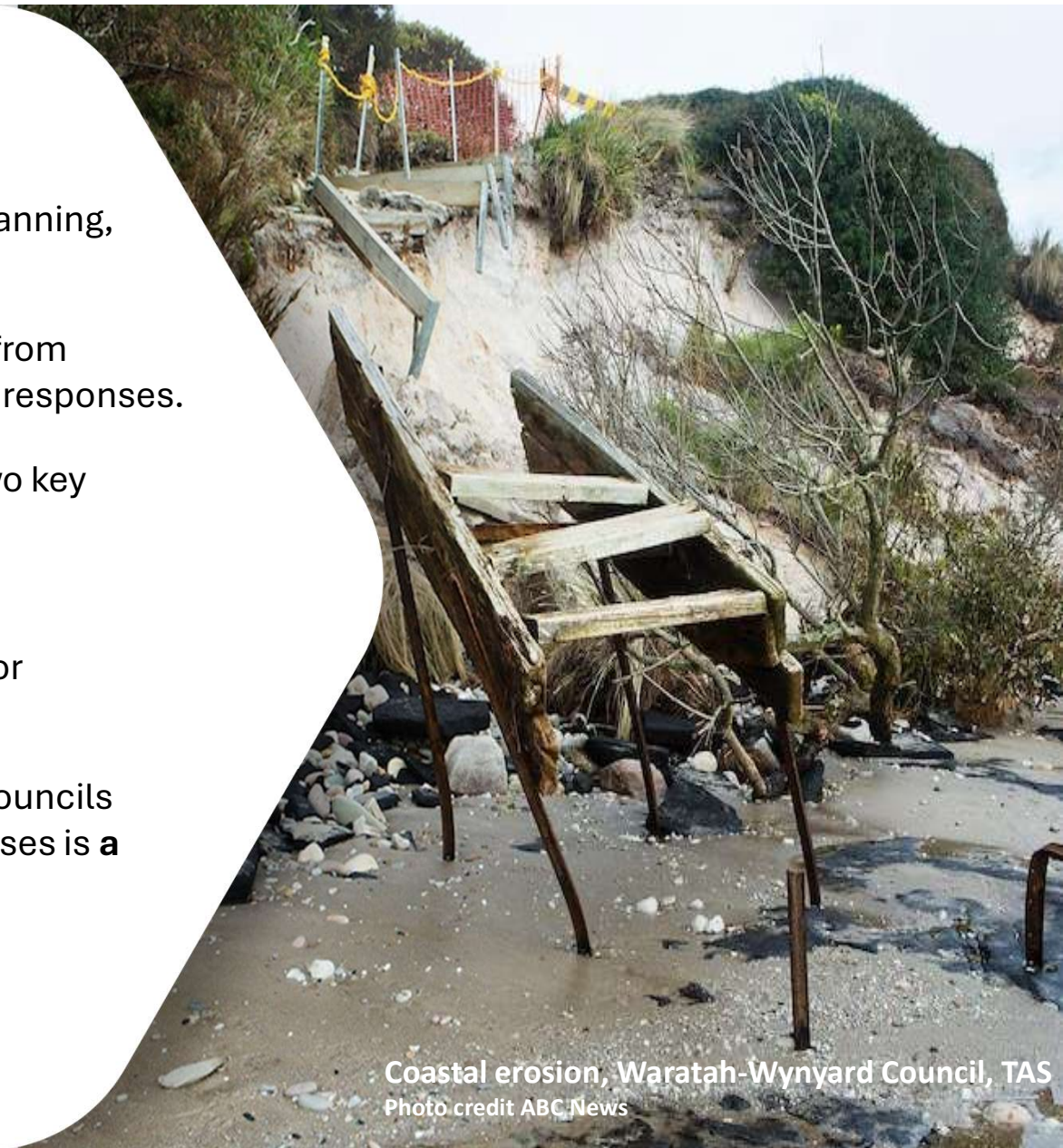
This research was carried out on Palawa Country, Lutruwita/Tasmania. It was co-funded by the Australian Government's Research Training Program and Natural Hazards Research Australia.



Research context

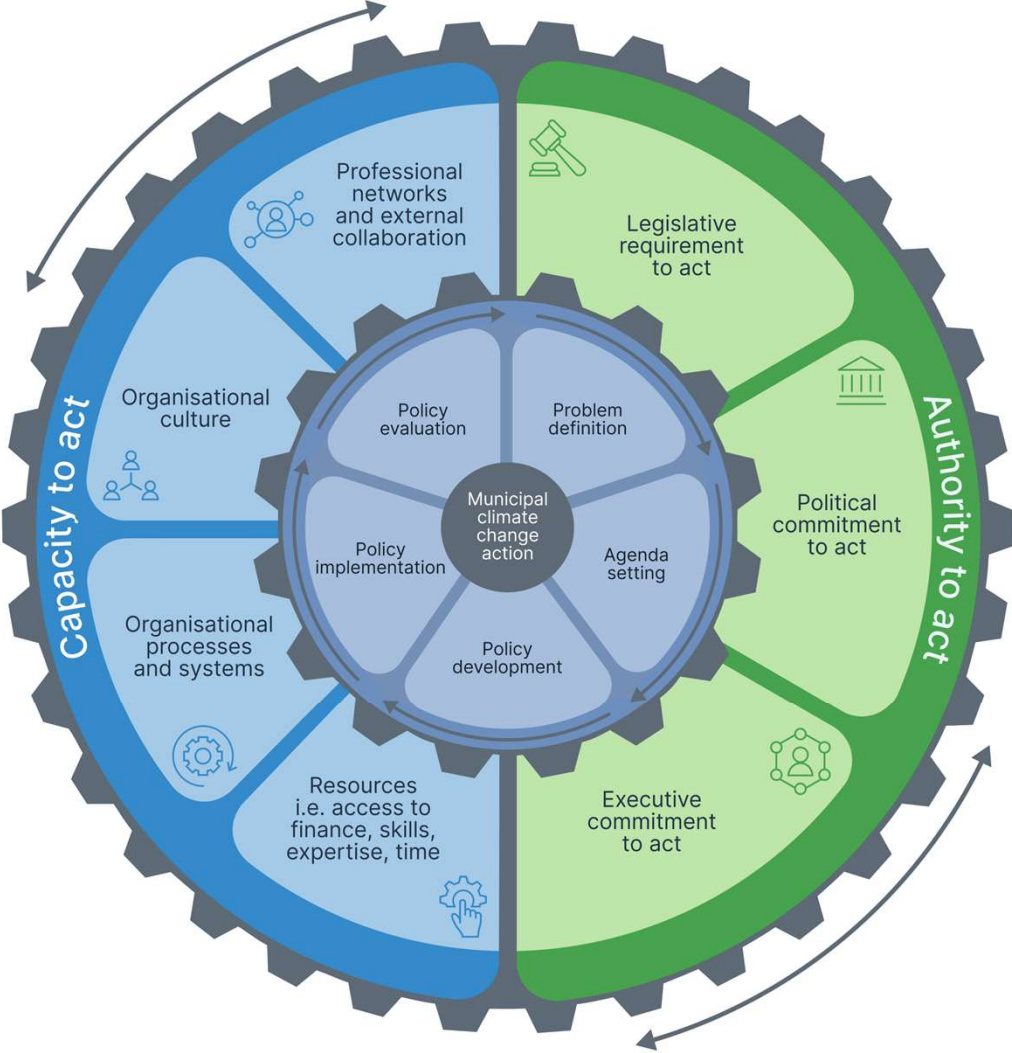
- Municipal councils play a vital role in climate risk planning, response, and recovery.
- Major break downs are occurring as councils move from planning to the implementation of intended climate responses.
- This implementation gap is largely an outcome of two key factors:
 - limited **organisational capacity**; and
 - absent or ineffective municipal **leadership** for adaptation.
- Globally, the **most frequently** identified barrier to councils delivering on-the-ground climate adaptation responses is a **lack of support from local government leaders***.

*Rogers, N.J.L., Adams, V.M., Byrne, J.A. (2023): Factors affecting the mainstreaming of climate change adaptation in municipal policy and practice, *Climate Policy* (open access) <https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2023.2208098>



Coastal erosion, Waratah-Wynyard Council, TAS
Photo credit ABC News

Conceptualising the challenge



Key research findings: The authorising environment

- Climate risk is often assigned a low priority on the policy agenda and in the council budget.
- Leaders and staff experience **immense pressure from their communities to respond to ‘day-to-day’ issues**, at the expense of medium to longer-term matters such as climate risk.
- Climate risk and adaptation **lack salience** among leaders.
- ‘Climate’ is widely viewed as an ‘environment issue’ or a politically divisive ‘Green issue’ - often managed as a siloed concern on the periphery of the organisation.
- Climate risk and adaptation are **not yet viewed as central policy priorities and whole-of-organisation responsibilities**.

For further details please see: Rogers, N.J.L., Adams, V.M., Byrne, J.A. (2024): Agenda-setting and policy leadership for municipal climate change adaptation, *Environmental Science & Policy* (open access) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2024.103869>

Flood damage, Latrobe Council, TAS
Photo credit The Advocate

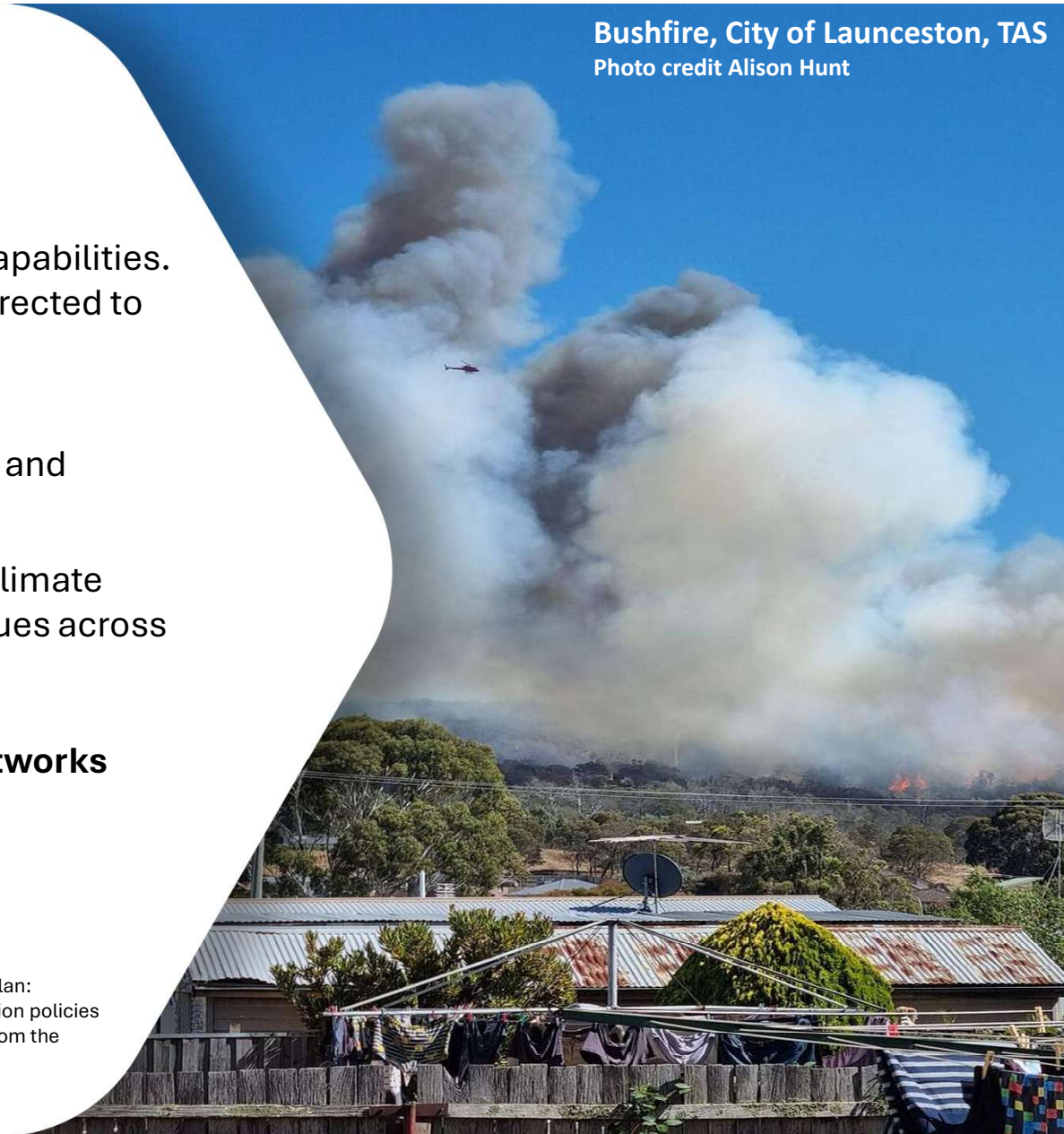


Key research findings: Capacity to adapt constrained by...

- Limited **financial resources** and revenue raising capabilities. Compounded where available resources are not directed to climate action.
- Insufficient **in-house expertise** in climate risk and adaptation. Compounded by challenges attracting and retaining staff.
- **Delegation down the organisational hierarchy**. Climate staff operate without a mandate to engage colleagues across the organisation. Policy siloes are apparent.

On the positive, **collaborations and peer learning networks** between councils strengthen council capacity for implementation.

For further details please see: Rogers, N.J.L., Adams, V.M., Byrne, J.A. (2024): Moving beyond the plan: exploring the opportunities to accelerate the implementation of municipal climate change adaptation policies and plan, *Environmental Policy & Governance* (subscription only – please request a copy directly from the authors) <https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.2142>



So, what can be done?

To bridge the municipal adaptation planning-to-implementation gap, opportunities must be created to:

- 1. Enhance issue salience** so that climate risk comes to be recognised as a central, whole-of-organisation municipal responsibility.
- 2. Strengthen municipal governance** to ensure that every significant decision and investment made by a council is viewed through a climate risk lens.
- 3. Build adaptation 'know how'** in councils through workforce training and climate capability development across teams.



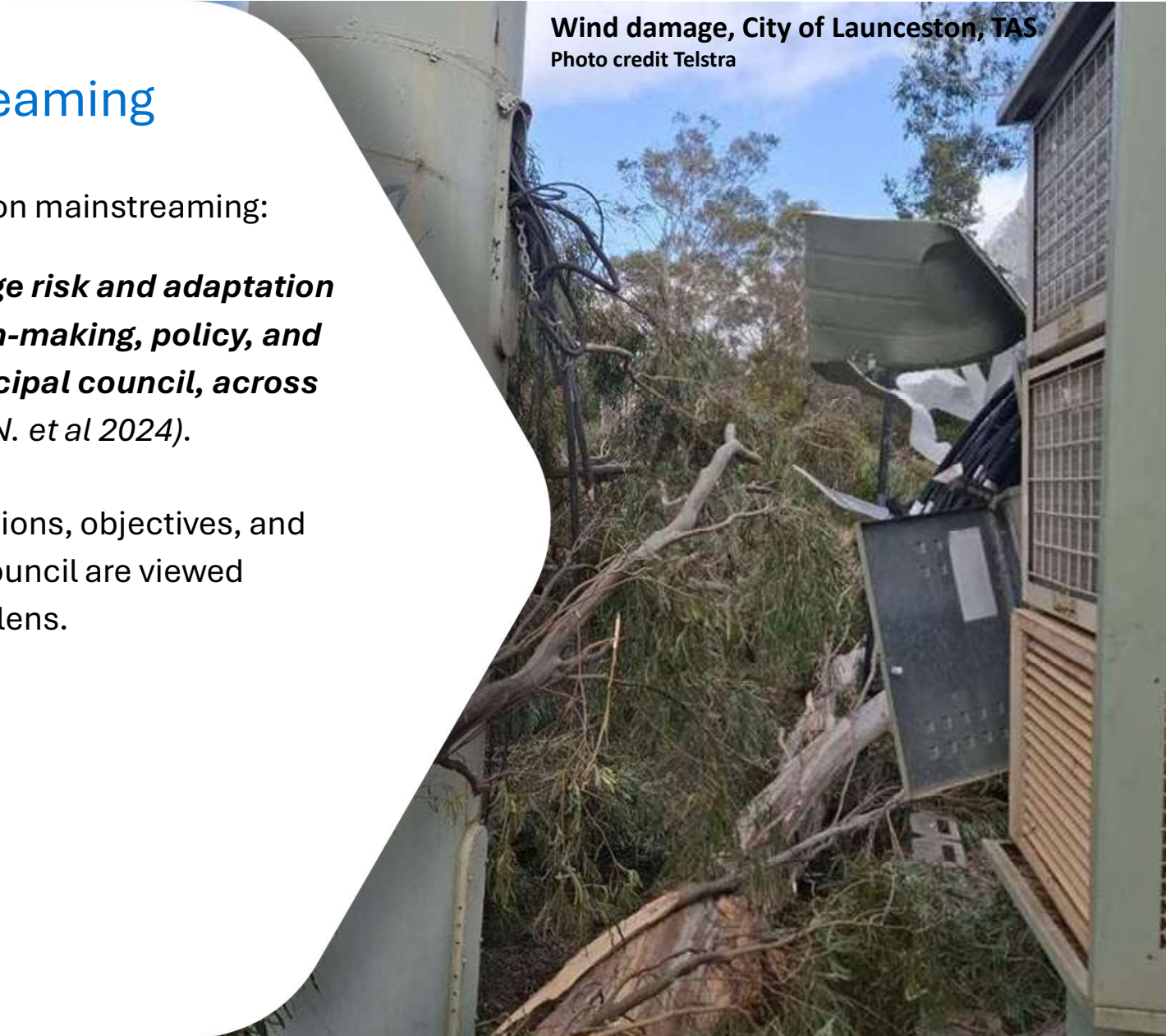
Municipal climate mainstreaming

- A need for municipal climate adaptation mainstreaming:

The integration of climate change risk and adaptation considerations into the decision-making, policy, and operational functions of a municipal council, across the whole organisation (Rogers N. et al 2024).

- This definition proposes that the decisions, objectives, and activities of all functional areas of a council are viewed through a climate risk and adaptation lens.

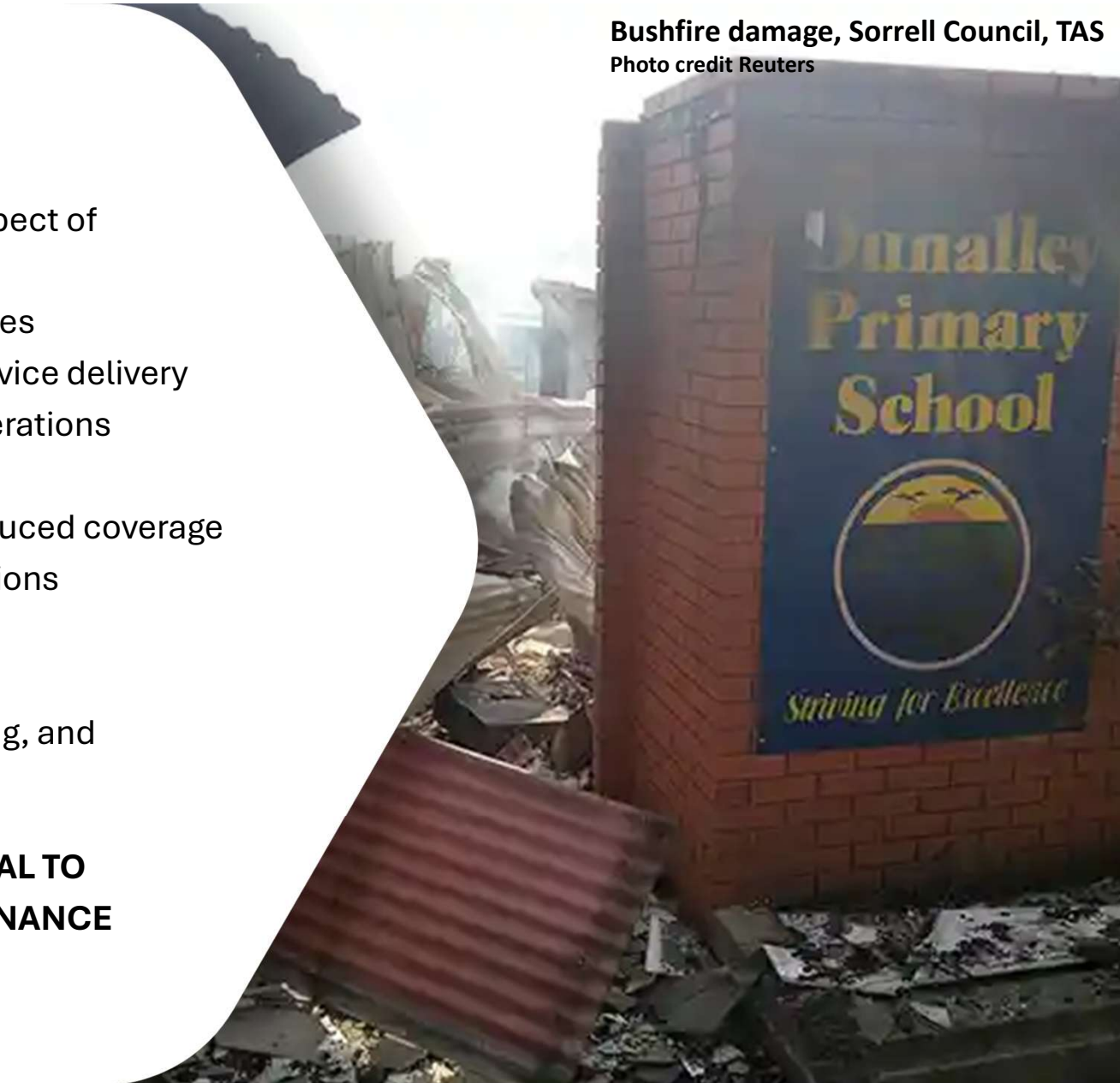
Wind damage, City of Launceston, TAS
Photo credit Telstra



Why climate mainstreaming?

- A changing climate will likely affect every aspect of municipal operations and service delivery.
 - ✓ Impacts on municipal strategic objectives
 - ✓ Impacts on business continuity and service delivery
 - ✓ Workforce safety and wellbeing considerations
 - ✓ Compounding financial costs
 - ✓ Rising insurance costs and possibly reduced coverage
 - ✓ Increased risk management considerations
 - ✓ Potential legal liability
 - ✓ Potential reputational harm
 - ✓ Impacts on community health, wellbeing, and prosperity

**GOOD CLIMATE GOVERNANCE IS CRITICAL TO
MAINTAINING GOOD MUNICIPAL GOVERNANCE**



Take home messages

- A changing climate will likely affect every aspect of municipal operations and service delivery.
- Local government adaptation is constrained by organisational capacity and the commitment of municipal leaders to act.
- There are clear opportunities to inform, guide, and support climate-responsive municipal governance.
- Climate mainstreaming provides a pragmatic opportunity to embed adaptation across all functions of council.
- Councils can position themselves for a 'new business-as-usual' where adaptation is an every-day part of the thinking, culture, and activity of working in local government.

Flooding, Central Coast Council, TAS
Photo credit Chris Kidd





Thank you

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Publications:

Rogers, N.J.L., Adams, V.M., Byrne, J.A. (Forthcoming): Mainstreaming municipal climate change adaptation: definition, objectives, pathways, and enablers (under journal review)

Rogers, N.J.L., Adams, V.M., Byrne, J.A. (2024): Agenda-setting and policy leadership for municipal climate change adaptation, *Environmental Science & Policy* (open access)

Rogers, N.J.L., Adams, V.M., Byrne, J.A. (2024): Moving beyond the plan: exploring the opportunities to accelerate the implementation of municipal climate change adaptation policies and plan, *Environmental Policy & Governance* (subscription only – please request a copy directly from the authors)

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