

# ANNUAL REPORT

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HAWAI'I CLIMATE  
CHANGE MITIGATION  
AND ADAPTATION  
COMMISSION



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# HAWAI'I CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION AND ADAPTATION COMMISSION MEMBERS AND STAFF



## COMMISSION CO-CHAIRS

**DAWN CHANG** - Chairperson of the Department of Land and Natural Resources

**MARY ALICE EVANS** - Director of the Office of Planning and Sustainable Development

## COMMISSION MEMBERS

**JAMES KUNANE TOKIOKA** - Director of the Department of Business, Economic Development, & Tourism

**BLAINE MIYASATO** - Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the Hawai'i Tourism Authority

**SHARON HURD** - Chairperson of the Board of Agriculture

**COLIN KIPPEN** - Chief Executive Officer of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs

**KALI WATSON** - Chairperson of the Hawaiian Homes Commission

**ED SNIFFEN** - Director of the Department of Transportation

**KENNETH FINK** - Director of the Department of Health

**WARREN HARUKI** - Chairperson of the Board of Education

**DAWN TAKEGUCHI APUNA** - Director of the City and County of Honolulu, Department of Planning & Permitting

**KATHLEEN AOKI** - Director of the County of Maui, Department of Planning

**ZENDO KERN** - Director of the County of Hawai'i, Department of Planning

**KA'ĀINA S. HULL** - Director of the County of Kaua'i, Department of Planning

**MIKE GABBARD** - Chair of the Senate Committee on Agriculture & Environment

**LORRAINE INOUE** - Chair of the Senate Committee on Water & Land

**NICOLE E. LOWEN** - Chair of the House Committee on Energy & Environmental Protection

**LINDA ICHIIYAMA** - Chair of the House Committee on Water & Land

**MAJOR GENERAL KENNETH S. HARA** - The Adjutant General

**JUSTINE NIHIPALI** - Manager of the Coastal Zone Management Program

## COMMISSION STAFF

**LEAH LARAMEE** - Coordinator

Website: [Climate.hawaii.gov](https://climate.hawaii.gov)

Facebook: @Hi Climate

Instagram: @HI\_Climate

# MISSION AND PRIORITY STATEMENTS

**Mission Statement:** Hawai'i's Climate Commission recognizes the urgency of climate threats and the need to act quickly. It promotes ambitious, climate-neutral, culturally responsive strategies for climate change adaptation and mitigation in a manner that is clean, equitable and resilient.

**Priority Statement: Mitigation<sup>1</sup>** The Commission recognizes that ground transportation contributes significantly to Hawai'i's share of greenhouse gas emissions. It supports a price on carbon, and mechanisms to reduce overall vehicle miles traveled, as well as converting all remaining vehicle-based ground transportation to renewable, zero-emission fuels and technologies.

**Priority Statement: Adaptation<sup>2</sup>** The Commission recognizes the serious impacts of sea level rise on Hawai'i. It supports legislation to address development along beaches, as well as funding programs that assist in planning and implementation; urges the incorporation of the sea level rise exposure area into counties' general and development plans; and recommends that agencies identify and prioritize their assets that lie within this area.

**Priority Statement: Guidance for Investment in Resilient Infrastructure<sup>3</sup>** The Commission emphasizes that nature-based solutions, green infrastructure, and carbon-smart practices must be implemented now and prioritized in all planning and future actions as part of a climate ready Hawai'i. By doing so, it supports State sustainability and climate resiliency which provide a multitude of economic, environmental, and social co-benefits.

**High Impact Actions:** As part of the 25-governor U.S. Climate Alliance, Hawai'i has committed to specific and new High Impact Actions that will accelerate greenhouse gas emission reductions and drive the real, impactful implementation and results needed to make the U.S. climate targets a reality. These priority areas include: Power, Buildings, Industry, Transportation, Just Transition and Equity, Resilience, Natural and Working Lands, and the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases. Commission members' HI Impact Actions - over seventy in all, and continually increasing - are listed on the Commission's website under the categories of equity, mitigation, adaptation, sequestration and resilience, mirroring the Commission's statement on resilient infrastructure. As climate change continues to pose an existential threat, Hawai'i helped ratchet up ambition abroad at the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP), and buckled down to work on adaptation actions at home. Hawai'i's Climate Commission also aims to continue coordinating actions being undertaken to limit warming to under 1.5°C.

**High Impact Actions include:**

100% net-zero operating emissions government buildings by 2030.

100% zero emission vehicles (ZEV) new light-duty sales by 2035.

100% zero-emission light-duty public fleets by 2035.

100% zero-emission public/government-owned transit bus fleets by 2030

100% zero-emission medium & heavy-duty public fleets by 2040, where technically feasible.

Promote sustainable communities that provide a range of affordable housing and transportation options that increase access to opportunity and reduce vehicle miles travelled (VMT).

Empower disadvantaged communities and foster leadership to develop climate/clean energy solutions and policies through training, facilitation, and funding.

Commit to a just transition that provides for sustainable livelihoods for those reliant on the fossil fuel economy in the shift to more sustainable systems and practices.

Integrate racial and gender diversity in developing environmental solutions to the climate crisis.

Conserve at least 30% of land and coastal waters by 2030.

Commit to large scale restoration of forests and other locally indigenous ecosystems. Increase tree canopy in disadvantaged and/or heat vulnerable communities by at least 40% by 2030 to mitigate urban heat island effects.

Increase consumption of food produced within the jurisdiction to at least 20-30% of food consumed by 2030.

Explore the adoption of zero-emission standards for space and water heating equipment.

Explore the adoption of Building Performance Standards like those enacted in Colorado, Maryland, Oregon, and Washington.

Explore the adoption of clean heat standards like those enacted in Colorado and Vermont.

Take actions to align buildings sector utility resource planning and procurement policies with state climate goals.

Join the U.S. Department of Energy's Better Climate Challenge, committing to reduce scope 1 and 2 emissions from state facilities by at least 50 percent in the next 10 years.

*Aloha Kākou,*

In this fourth year of the Climate Decade, 2020 - 2030, the members of the Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Commission continue to urge that immediate, strong actions are needed to mitigate the ongoing climate crisis and lead the change we want to see in the world through Hawai'i's values and commitment to action.

This year, Hawai'i experienced the severity of the crisis when climate-related drought conditions and high winds sparked the devastating Maui wildfires. As we mourn the loss of life, land, and cultural resources, we are working to advocate for policy changes for mitigation and adaptation actions that are so desperately needed to lessen the impact of future climate disasters.



This year, the Climate Commission expanded the ways we advocate through our annual conference, legislative session participation, renewed community engagement, and the ongoing support of member departments through our AmeriCorps VISTA cohort.

2023 also brought the first year of funding from the Inflation Reduction Act to the Climate Commission for statewide climate planning and project implementation that will take place over the next few years.

Efforts to implement current knowledge and research across the state have continued this year, with a focus on keeping the community informed and supporting the work of both governmental and non-profit organizations across the state. Drawing on Hawai'i's strong sense of interconnectedness and commitment to action, key efforts this year have included:

- **Engaging our communities with the latest climate information.** In a post-pandemic world, the Climate Commission has strengthened its efforts to connect with local communities across Hawai'i, both sharing information and resources and empowering communities to be involved in decisions that affect them. Our first-ever Community Climate Fairs brought together community members and local organizations in a way that will lay the groundwork for further outreach efforts in years to come.



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- **Advancing equity and resilience.** Using the Commission's commitment to equity as a starting point, we are working to ensure that Hawai'i's most vulnerable communities have the resources they need to adapt to climate shocks and stressors, and that no one has to bear an unequal burden.
  - **Expanding capacity for member departments through our VISTA team.** Through our Climate Ready AmeriCorps VISTA Cohort, departments across the state have been supported in implementing climate change priorities: from addressing energy and transportation affordability, developing outreach and communications materials on climate change issues, to increasing capacity for climate change projects and meetings.
  - **Inspiring change around the world.** Through our close involvement with the 25-governor U.S. Climate Alliance, the global regional partnership of the Under 2 Coalition, The Climate Registry and the Conveners Network, we continued to inspire climate ambition abroad and at home.

This year, again, the Commission, its member departments, its Statewide Climate Coordinator, and its VISTAs are honored and proud to support Hawai'i's public, legislative and executive branches in service of Act 32.

With aloha,

Dawn Chang

Co-Chair, Hawai'i Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Commission  
Chair, Department of Land and Natural Resources

Mary Alice Evans

Co-Chair, Hawai'i Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Commission  
Director, Office of Planning and Sustainable Development, Department of  
Business, Economic Development and Tourism



# OPERATIONALIZING CLIMATE READY HAWAI'I

The Commission's guiding principles embodied in its various statements are operationalized in its Climate Ready Hawai'i initiative. These projects and efforts summarize actions taken by the Climate Commission in 2023 to advance a Climate Ready Hawai'i.

## a. Funds sought and awarded

Funding is crucial to achieving success in climate action projects across the state. The Commission actively pursued funding opportunities that will have a lasting impact on climate mitigation and adaptation needs.

This summer, the Climate Commission applied for and was granted \$3 million in federal funding for climate mitigation planning through EPA's Climate Pollution Reduction Grant program (CPRG). This funding will be used to write a statewide Priority Climate Action Plan (PCAP) and a Comprehensive Climate Action Plan (CCAP), which will serve as a roadmap for applying for and implementing further funding through CPRG. \$4.6 billion will be made available nationwide to implement the strategies identified by the planning grant. The Climate Commission is engaged in an in-depth process of identifying climate mitigation projects that focus on greenhouse gas reduction, clean energy, and equity. This involves gathering input and information from stakeholders, coordinating projects with state, county, and local organizations, and outreach to community members with a focus on equity to ensure that the funded climate mitigation projects advance equity for all of Hawai'i's communities, especially those who face disproportionate vulnerability to climate change.

In addition, funding was renewed through the AmeriCorps VISTA program to continue the Climate Ready VISTA Cohort for three more years. Additional funding for operations support was also awarded to the Commission. The VISTA program has successfully placed volunteers in key state and county offices to assist with projects that advance climate action from the lens of poverty alleviation and community resilience. This funding will enable even more AmeriCorps members to serve in this important area.

The Commission was also awarded funding to support Climate Week through Ulupono Initiative to bring together youth and climate advocates to share and discuss how to engage and learn more about key climate issues impacting their daily lives and beyond. The Commission's Community Climate Fairs were supported through a grant from the Hawai'i State Energy Office.

## **b. Support and coordination for key offices to address resilience in vulnerable communities.**



As climate change exacerbates weather patterns and extreme weather events, it is important to equip those who do not have the resources to recover and thrive as a result of even relatively "minor" disasters. Particularly vulnerable are low-income communities and those who are considered homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless. The Commission has begun working on creating coordinated statewide efforts to identify and address the impacts of climate change and related policies on vulnerable populations and communities.

### **i. Accurate representation in federal datasets**

In 2021, President Biden issued a historic commitment to equity by signing Executive Order 14008, also known as the Justice40 Initiative, which mandates that at least 40% of the benefits of certain federal initiatives will flow to disadvantaged communities. However, eligibility is determined by the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)<sup>6</sup>, which does not accurately represent Hawai'i. The disproportionate wealth gap between communities within the same census tracts, the exclusion of certain climate-change related hazards present on islands, and the high cost of living compared to the federal poverty line, results in the CEJST not accurately reflecting communities that are considered disadvantaged according to local knowledge and datasets.

This year, the Climate Commission formed a working group across various state and county agencies to address this issue and ensure that Hawai'i's disadvantaged communities will be eligible for Justice40 support. The working group is coordinating efforts to submit feedback to CEJST based on local data, including the Social Vulnerability to Climate Change in Hawai'i Data, Indicators, and "Gap" Assessment (2022) as well as pursuing funding to create an accessible, user-friendly database on climate change and social vulnerability that can be used for local knowledge and decision-making.

#### ii. Climate Ready VISTA Cohort

Through a grant from AmeriCorps, a total of 8 volunteers served in relevant offices including the Hawai'i State Energy Office, the Hawai'i Green Infrastructure Authority, the Hawai'i Department of Transportation, the Hawaii County Planning Office, and the Kauai County Planning Office to work on projects that benefit disadvantaged/overburdened communities and increase resilience to climate change. Projects included outreach to ensure that community members have a voice in county and statewide climate action plans, coordination of urban forestry and energy literacy efforts, grant writing, and research and planning for clean and equitable transportation. VISTAs also mobilized outreach efforts to connect community members to programs and incentives that help to both save money and transition to clean energy and transportation, including the Electric Bike and Moped Rebate, Weatherization Assistance Program, Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, and Energy Smart for Homes. Additionally, the VISTA cohort regularly volunteered with other local and non-profit agencies in the community on projects including regenerative Hawaiian agriculture, community placemaking, and post-wildfire relief efforts for Maui. The program will expand over the next 3 years to continue to provide support for climate change and resilience efforts.

### c. Local and global policy efforts for climate action.

Hawai‘i’s geographic isolation makes it critical to connect to the rest of the world in dealing with this global challenge. For this reason, the Commission and its staff are involved at all levels of climate change response—from the global to the state and county levels to local communities. Such involvement provides venues to highlight the work being done in Hawai‘i, forms channels of knowledge sharing and cooperation across jurisdictions, and helps align Hawai‘i’s efforts with sub-national, national, and international mitigation and adaptation efforts. Here are some of this year’s efforts that Hawai‘i has been involved in through the Commission and its staff:

**National:** Commission co-chairs and staff provide updates and respond to information requests to Hawai‘i’s Congressional delegation. The Commission is engaged in the many national efforts of the US Climate Alliance (USCA), the 25-governor effort that pledged to uphold the US’s commitments to the Paris Climate Agreement. USCA supports Hawai‘i in its climate actions such as cutting emissions, accelerating climate action and policies, building resilience to the impacts of climate change, and promoting clean energy deployment at the state and federal level. USCA supports deploying bipartisan climate actions at scale centered around equity, environmental justice and a just economic transition, to safeguard public health, grow the U.S. economy, and secure a net-zero future. Commission staff serves as a Governor’s Representative to coordinate, collate, and organize responses to the Governor’s Office and participates in the Resilience, Transportation, Natural and Working Lands and Just Transition working groups. The Alliance is a valuable resource for Hawai‘i’s efforts, as it provides knowledge, guidance, funding, and amplification of climate change efforts at the state level.

**State:** The Commission provides information and analysis in many ways, particularly through the legislative session and the annual statewide conference.

**i. Legislative Action.** The Commission regularly engages with the legislature through submitting legislative testimony on measures relevant to climate change. Bills include the establishment of climate smart programs, setting carbon emissions goals, addressing sea level rise, and supporting partner agencies in their climate work. This year, Commission staff testified in person, coordinated testimony with departments and partners, flagged issues for legislators, and responded to requests for information.

**ii. Annual Conference.** The statewide climate change conference is a flagship event for the Commission. It highlights research, practice, and engagement on the state's climate change response. It is the culmination of year-long work, cutting edge knowledge, and valuable partnerships. This year's Climate Week was held in January of 2023 in partnership with the Pacific Islands Climate Adaptation Science Center, Pacific Regional Integrated Sciences and Assessments, the East-West Center, Hawai'i Sea Grant, US Forest Service, and others.<sup>7</sup> The week began with a Climate Action Day which focused on natural solutions to climate challenges, climate legislation, and youth climate action. It also featured a Hawai'i Climate adaptation Summit, a panel discussion from women leaders who represented Hawai'i and the Pacific Islands at COP27, and the 20th Anniversary of the Hawai'i Energy Policy Forum, which examined strategic alliances for decarbonization and energy self-sufficiency.



## d. Implementation of climate action projects. ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

### i. Mitigation

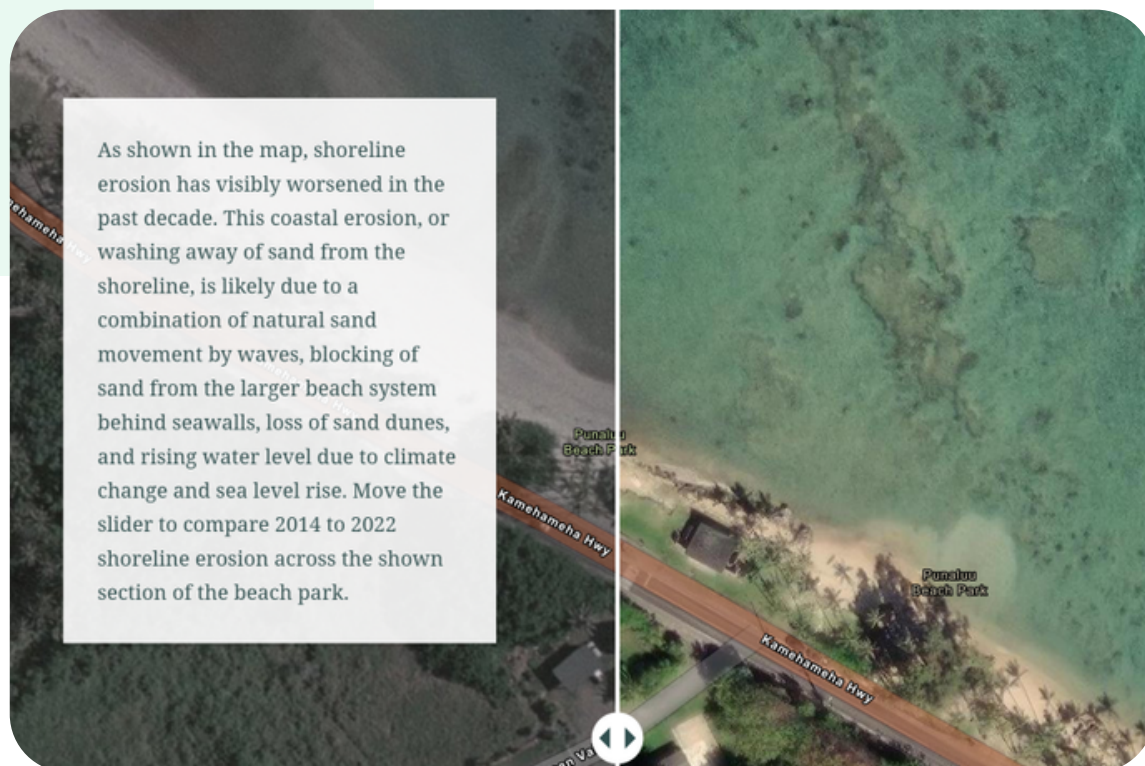
As reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emission and increasing the capacity for Natural and working lands to sequester GHGs are the primary pathways that climate change can be mitigated, the Climate Commission is committed to supporting initiatives that will lower emissions. Efforts are underway to create a statewide Priority Climate Action Plan (PCAP) and Comprehensive Climate Action Plan (CCAP) and apply for CPRG funding up to \$4.6 billion that will implement climate mitigation strategies including improved clean transportation options, protecting natural lands, renewable energy, creating a circular economy, nature-based solutions, regenerative agriculture, waste prevention, and energy incentives. Focus groups to identify needs and project opportunities for funding have begun across sectors and organizations, and outreach to community members will follow within the next few months. Additionally, the Climate Commission is in the process of hiring 5 new positions in partnership with Hawai'i Sea Grant to support this effort, including a climate action program manager, outreach leader, data specialist, and grant manager. This will greatly expand the Climate Commission's capacity to ensure that the CPRG funded projects meet our most pressing climate mitigation needs, and uplift Hawai'i's communities that are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Additionally, the Climate Commission continues to support projects that advance sustainable transportation and reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT). One such effort has been the continuation of research for multimodal mobility hubs- locations that connect alternative transit modes such as bike share, carpool, and public transit, making them a convenient and accessible option for community members. Commission staff and VISTAs have helped to take an inventory of state-owned parking spots to identify potential locations to create mobility hubs, as well as researching barriers and solutions for clean transportation for shift workers who travel outside of regular business hours. This helps to create an equitable transportation system alongside reducing greenhouse gas emissions from VMTs.



## ii. Adaptation

In collaboration with Hawai'i Sea Grant, the Department of Land and Natural Resources, the Department of Transportation, and the partnership of the surrounding community, the Climate Commission is continuing work on a pilot project to address the impacts of sea level rise and coastal erosion at Punalu'u Beach Park.<sup>8</sup> Not only will this protect the coastline and the Kamehameha Highway in Punalu'u, it will serve as a model for future efforts as the impacts of sea level rise become more frequent and severe. This year, the Climate Commission continued to work with contractors to identify nature-based solutions, and plans are being created to pursue relocating offshore sand deposits back to the beach. Additionally, Commission staff have attended community meetings and events to receive feedback on the community's vision for the beach park. Within the next few months, there will be a community planting day to place native plants along the shoreline, which will result in slower erosion rates and community stewardship of the area.





# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

## a. Updates and resources.

Through its climate change portal ([climate.hawaii.gov](https://climate.hawaii.gov)), social media accounts, webinars, presentations, briefings, blogs, and articles, Commission staff and VISTAs provide the latest climate change information to Hawai'i's communities. 2023 highlights include:

**i. Commission Meetings.** This year, all Commission meetings were held in a hybrid format with the option to attend in-person or virtually. All meeting we recorded and made available to the public on the Commission's website<sup>9</sup>, and community members had the opportunity to stay informed on the work being performed within the Commission's respective departments, and to submit testimony if they chose.

**ii. Online informational materials.** The climate portal continues to be updated regularly with relevant events, research, and resources. Significant updates in 2023 included a portal on the climate action plans and CPRG grant, a tool to easily locate clean energy assistance/rebate programs by county, and new pages on clean transportation choices and policy recommendations.

**iii. Monthly newsletters.** The Climate Commission continues to publish monthly newsletters inform subscribers on the Commission's work, opportunities to participate in meetings, and current research and policy updates. It also sometimes features grant opportunities and climate/sustainability job openings with both government and non-profit organizations across the state. Many new people joined the mailing list this year through the Commission website and through outreach events.

**iv. Social media.** The Commission's two social media accounts (on Instagram and Facebook) continue to generate activity and engagement.<sup>10, 11</sup> Content this year ranged from events and meeting notices, to relevant research and news articles, to informational slides on mitigation and adaptation activities such as waste reduction, safe routes to school, and heat-related illness prevention. Engagement with the Commission's social media this year grew to over 1,500 followers and increased likes and comments.

## b. Outreach

With much risk associated with the pandemic having been controlled, the Climate Commission has resumed in-person community outreach efforts. 2023 was a highlight year with new outreach strategies and events.

**i. Community Climate Fairs.** In May and June of 2023, the Climate Commission hosted its first-ever series of Community Climate Fairs on O'ahu and Big Island. The events brought together government, non-profit, and community-led organizations with community members to share information and resources on climate change. The events were funded through a grant from the Hawai'i State Energy Office and planned by Climate Ready VISTA Cohort. In total, they brought together over 70 organizations and 300 individuals. Participants reported high levels of engagement and valuable information about climate change. As an engagement tool, there was a raffle attendees could enter based on the number of booths they visited with, and win prizes that promoted a sustainable lifestyle with the grand prize of a new bicycle. This was an important draw for those who might not have otherwise attended climate events. The Commission plans to host additional climate fairs in future years based on how successful the events were.

**ii. Tabling Events.** In addition to the Climate Fairs, the Climate Commission was able to reach new people by having a presence at community events including the Kaua'i Earth Day celebration, volunteer fairs at the University of Hawai'i, the Honolulu Century Ride, The Community Resource and Food Distribution Fair at Kuhio Park Terrace. This resulted in many new sign-ups for the Commission newsletter and information and resources on climate change and sustainability distributed to the community.



## REFERENCE LINKS

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- [3] <https://climate.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/FINAL-statement-on-decision-making-and-investment-guidance-Jul-19-2021.pdf>
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- [10] The Commission's Instagram account (@HI\_Climate) can be found at: [https://www.instagram.com/hi\\_climate/](https://www.instagram.com/hi_climate/)
- [11] The Commission's Facebook page (@hiclimate) can be found at: <https://www.facebook.com/hiclimate>